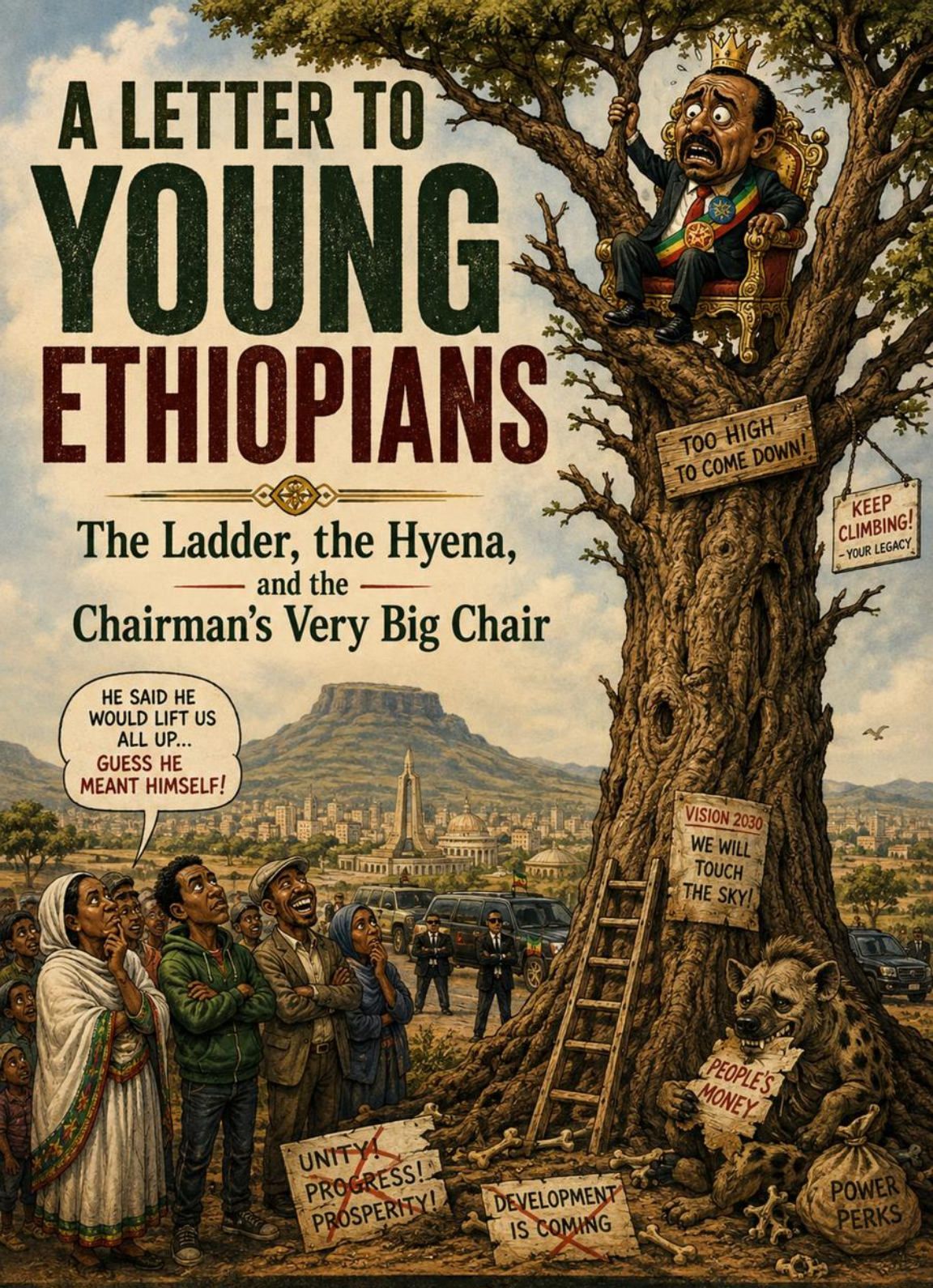
A LETTER TO YOUNG ETHIOPIANS

The Ladder, the Hyena, and the Chairman's Very Big Chair


TOO HIGH TO COME DOWN!
KEEP CLIMBING! – YOUR LEGACY
HE SAID HE WOULD LIFT US ALL UP... GUESS HE MEANT HIMSELF!
VISION 2030 WE WILL TOUCH THE SKY!
PEOPLE'S MONEY
POWER PERKS
UNITY! PROGRESS! PROSPERITY!
DEVELOPMENT IS COMING

Dr. Mesfin Taye

FREE READING EDITION

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Laugh at the chair. Question the microphone. Inspect the budget. Keep the ladder standing.

A LETTER TO YOUNG ETHIOPIANS

The Ladder, the Hyena, and the Chairman's Very Big Chair

A satirical letter about power, politics, national pride, and the institutions that should survive every leader.

Dr. Mesfin Taye

LOOK AT HIM GO.
SHORT, BUT FULL OF CONFIDENCE.
LET'S JUST MAKE SURE HE DOESN'T GET US LOST.
THE FUTURE IS BUILT BY US.
FORWARD! TO GLORY! OR... SOMETHING! I'M NOT GREAT WITH DETAILS.
REAL WORK. REAL PEOPLE. REAL ETHIOPIA.
VERY STABLE TOTALLY TALL

Real work. Real people. Real Ethiopia. The chairman in this book is fictional; his box is not.

The hunger for power usually grows from a sense of inferiority. That is why the man who feels smallest in the district so often ends up in the biggest chair — as kebele chairman.

— Dr. Mesfin Taye

Copyright and Note on Satire

Copyright © 2026 Dr. Mesfin Taye. All original prose, chapter organization, captions, and editorial cartoons in this edition are reserved by the author. Any remaining third-party photographs retain the credits listed at the back. This is a book-length political satire written as a letter to young Ethiopians. Its presidents, chairmen, ministers, generals, advisers, convoys, committees, microphones, and permanent temporary offices are fictional composites. No fictional foolishness should be mistaken for a factual claim about a named living person.

The satire attacks insecurity, hypocrisy, corruption, personal rule, institutional weakness, and the worship of office. It does not mock ethnicity, language, religion, disability, poverty, or physical appearance. Africa is the setting; abusive power is the target.

A few serious personal stories remain because a book that laughs at power must remember who pays for its decisions. The Professor Alula passport episode is presented as the author recalls Professor Alula telling it, not as independently verified archival correspondence.

The introduction titled “The Ladder” is retained as the book’s central metaphor. The rest of the manuscript now favors continuous comic storytelling over chronological political history.

Dedication

To the great people of Awasa, who opened their homes and hearts to university students returning from the Blate military training center during the collapse of the Derg.

At a time of confusion, fear, and uncertainty, you offered food, shelter, kindness, and human dignity to young people who needed help. You did not ask what political side they belonged to. You saw tired students and treated them as your own children.

Your generosity may not appear in history books, but it lives in the memories of those you helped.

To the mothers, fathers, families, and ordinary citizens of Awasa who cared for strangers as family — this remembrance is for you.

A Personal Note to the Reader

Young Ethiopian, I am not writing this book because I believe I have all the answers. I am writing because I have lived long enough to collect many questions — and because some questions become rude if we keep refusing to ask them.

I was trained first in Ethiopia. Later, science took me to Germany, where I had the opportunity to work at the Max Planck Institute in biophysics. My scientific life also took me to Taiwan, Korea, Japan, and eventually the United States. That gave me an unusual opportunity. I could look back at the country where I was born while living and working inside countries that had followed very different paths. Germany. Japan. South Korea. Taiwan. The United States.

They are not perfect countries. No country is. But I kept asking: Why did some societies accumulate capability while Ethiopia — with its history, people, land, water, culture, faith, and intelligence — continued to struggle?

I came to believe there is no single answer. Leadership matters. Institutions matter. Education matters. Hard work matters. Peace matters. Economic opportunity matters. The transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next matters. Character matters.

But there is something else. A nation must learn. A country cannot repeatedly destroy what the previous generation built and expect to move forward. Yesterday must become today’s foundation. It should not repeatedly become today’s enemy.

That is why I am writing this letter — not principally to teach you a timeline, but to laugh with you at the habits that keep damaging institutions. Governments change names. The oversized chair keeps finding a new owner.

Sooner or later, Ethiopia will be yours. I hope you inherit the country without inheriting our political theater. This edition asks you to distinguish a speech from a result, a

convoy from development, a title from wisdom, patriotism from manipulation, and a national plan from a hotel launch with excellent tea.

How to Read This Letter

This is not a conventional history book. It is one continuous comic letter. The stories move from one fictional leader to another: President Until Further Notice, Chairman Very Big Chair, the Minister of Announcements, General Permanently Available, the Adviser to the Adviser, and the ordinary citizen who still needs one stamp.

The recurring symbols remain simple. The ladder is lawful entry and exit from power. The chair is office used as private therapy. The microphone is ego with electricity. The convoy is distance from ordinary life. The hyena is fear that teaches victims to protect silence. The passport is the relationship between citizen and country.

Read the jokes as mirrors. Some are exaggerated. That is what satire does: it enlarges a habit until we can no longer pretend not to see it. The serious chapters are pauses in the laughter, not a return to a history textbook.

You do not need to agree with every conclusion. But please do not defend nonsense merely because the nonsense speaks your language, carries your flag, or belongs to your political side.

The Cast of Recurring Characters

President Until Further Notice — a humble servant of the people who has served continuously since the people were young.

Chairman Very Big Chair — a local official whose furniture grows whenever his self-confidence shrinks.

The Minister of Announcements — responsible for launching, re-launching, revitalizing, inaugurating, and explaining why implementation begins next year.

General Permanently Available — retired, returned, retired again, and always prepared to save the nation from civilians.

The Adviser to the Adviser — a highly trained specialist in converting bad news into excellent progress.

The Permanent Temporary Committee — created for ninety days and now preparing its twentieth anniversary report.

The Ordinary Citizen — the only character who knows the price of bread, the length of the queue, and whether the electricity is actually on.

Young Ethiopian — the person receiving this letter, laughing at the jokes, and eventually responsible for building something better.

These characters are fictional. Their behavior has been observed in many climates and is available without a visa.

The rule of the book: laugh at the chair, question the microphone, inspect the budget, and keep the ladder standing.

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A NOTE TO THE READER

Three Small Stories

A note from my own life, before the fictional republic opens its doors

Before the fictional republic opens its doors, allow me three true stories from my own life. They are small. That is why I trust them. Institutions reveal themselves in small rooms.

The Opportunity Lost to Bureaucracy

One of the clearest lessons I learned about institutions came from my own scientific career. I received an opportunity to work with the International Centre for Theoretical Physics in Trieste, Italy, and later became part of a “sandwich” research arrangement intended to connect my scientific development abroad with Ethiopia. The idea was valuable: advanced training, a maintained connection with home, and a return with stronger knowledge to contribute to the country.

I returned to Ethiopia expecting the administrative process to move forward. Instead, the bureaucracy took a very long time. The opportunity was there. The international support was there. I was ready. The paperwork was not.

In the meantime I received a research offer from the Max Planck Institute in Germany, one of the world’s leading scientific institutions. I could not ask such an institution to wait indefinitely while an office processed my case. I accepted. As a result, the Italian — Ethiopian program lost the funding that had already been allocated for my participation.

The opportunity was not lost because Ethiopia lacked talented scientists, or because foreign institutions were unwilling to cooperate. It was lost because the system moved more slowly than the opportunity. This is a form of brain drain that is rarely discussed. We imagine that

talented people simply decide to leave. Often they try to remain connected. Funding exists; training exists; institutions are willing. Then an office waits. A letter waits. A signature waits. The scientist cannot wait forever. A country may spend years asking why its educated people leave while the answer sits quietly inside its own administrative system. When opportunity moves faster than bureaucracy, talent eventually follows opportunity.

The General and the Sick Child

Before my career centered on physics, I worked in a small medical clinic as a laboratory technician. One day a highly decorated military general arrived with his sick daughter. The doctor examined the child, realized the clinic did not have the facilities to treat her condition properly, and gave the responsible advice: “You should take your daughter to a larger hospital.”

That should have been a simple medical decision. Instead, the general became extremely angry and began shouting at the doctor. His reaction was not about medicine. It was about authority. He seemed unable to accept that a small clinic could tell him, a powerful officer, that it could not provide what he wanted. The doctor was not insulting him. The doctor was trying to protect his daughter. But when power becomes too deeply connected to personal identity, professional advice begins to sound like disrespect.

That is dangerous. A doctor must be able to tell a general the truth. An engineer must be able to tell a minister that a bridge is unsafe. A scientist must be able to tell a government that the data do not support its claim. A judge must be able to tell a president that the law says no. If every professional must first calculate the rank of the person in front of him, expertise becomes decoration. The irony of that day has stayed with me: the general’s power could command soldiers, frighten people, and fill a uniform with medals. It could not change the medical condition of his

child. Reality does not salute. A country becomes dangerous when authority expects truth to stand at attention.

The Man Who Wanted That Piece of the Lamb

There was an important meeting, and a large buffet. At the center was an entire roasted lamb, carefully prepared and arranged so that many guests could be served. Then an important official arrived, looked at the lamb, and pointed to one particular part. “I want that piece.” The server hesitated. To cut exactly there would ruin the way the whole animal had been prepared, and there were many other good pieces. But the official had authority, and nobody wanted to say no. So the server cut where he demanded, and the whole arrangement was damaged so that one powerful person could receive the exact piece he wanted.

It was only lunch. It was also a political lesson. A healthy institution is something prepared for everyone: there are rules, there is structure, there is a purpose larger than one person’s appetite. Then someone powerful arrives and says, “I want that part.” Maybe it is a government position for a relative, a contract, public land, a university appointment, a budget, or a law standing between the official and what he wants. Everyone knows that cutting there will damage the whole structure. But because the person has authority, nobody says, “No. Choose another piece.” So they cut. And then they cut again. Eventually the institution no longer has a recognizable shape.

This is how public systems become private property — not through one dramatic act, but through thousands of small exceptions made for important people. The official receives his piece. Everyone else receives what remains. A country cannot build strong institutions if every powerful person is allowed to cut wherever he wants.

Keep these three rooms in mind — the office where the letter waited, the clinic where the truth was shouted at, and the table where the lamb was cut — as you meet the

President, the Chairman, and the hyena in the pages that follow. They are fiction. The rooms are not.

INTRODUCTION

The Ladder

How a leader climbs up, removes the steps, and then complains that he cannot retire

Young Ethiopian, let me introduce you to His Excellency President Until Further Notice.

He loves ladders. At least, he loves one direction: up. At the beginning, the ladder stands in the public square. Ordinary people built it. One step is called law. Another is called elections. Another is called courts. Higher up are a free press, political competition, term limits, and the peaceful retirement of leaders. None of the steps is perfect. A few are cracked. One was installed backward by a committee. But the ladder is usable. The future president arrives wearing a modest shirt and a serious expression. He places one foot on the first step and says, “I am only a servant of the people.”

The people applaud. They hold the ladder steady. Journalists describe his courage. Students carry posters. Elders bless the climb. Civil servants prepare a strategic framework for the coordination of ladder-related national aspirations. He climbs higher.

At the second step he promises justice. At the third he promises unity. At the fourth he promises that, unlike the previous man, he will never become addicted to power. By the time he reaches the top, he has promised so many things that the promises require their own ministry.

Then he looks down and discovers a terrifying mathematical fact: if he climbed the ladder, somebody else can climb it too. Suddenly the ladder becomes a threat to national security. The independent court is removed for “temporary maintenance.” The free press step is declared too noisy. The opposition step is accused of being imported. The election step remains, but it is moved very far apart from the next

one, so only trained professionals can cross it. The term-limit step disappears during a constitutional renovation. Nobody remembers who signed the work order.

Soon only the bottom step remains. It is used for campaign photographs.

Years pass. President Until Further Notice becomes tired. His knees hurt. His advisers are old. The palace has forty-seven rooms, a conference hall, three portraits of the president, and a helicopter pad. What it does not have is a staircase down. The president looks below. His opponents are angry. Some promise prison. Others promise revenge. A few promise a national dialogue immediately after revenge. His friends whisper that the country will collapse if he leaves. He agrees with them. After all, they are the only people still allowed close enough to whisper.

Now remaining in power is no longer merely ambition. It is survival.

This is the great political comedy that becomes a national tragedy: the leader is trapped at the top of the ladder he dismantled himself.

Power has the same appetite in every climate. But in countries with weak institutions, dangerous exits, personal armies, frightened courts, and traditions of revenge, the top of the tree can become a prison with a good view.

That is why this book begins with the ladder.

Our future does not depend only on finding a good person. Good people change. Frightened people change faster. A humble candidate becomes a suspicious ruler after five years of applause and no honest conversation. A brave revolutionary discovers that the presidential mattress is unusually comfortable. A professor who wrote essays on freedom decides that criticism is acceptable only when directed at the previous government.

So the question is not whether we can find a perfect leader. There are only human beings, and human beings should

never be given a chair taller than the law. The better question is whether we can build a system in which an imperfect leader can enter office, serve, make mistakes, be corrected, lose an election, leave safely, and live out his life without the nation needing either a funeral or a military operation.

This book will laugh at leaders of our fictional republic, including several fictional chairmen who own stamps, flags, microphones, and mysterious confidence. But the leaders are not the only people in the story. A ruler cannot remove every step alone. Someone writes the order. Someone stamps it. Someone explains it on television. Someone teaches students that it was historically necessary. Someone remains silent because the hyena is eating somebody else's leg.

So before we begin, let us make an agreement.

We will look backward, but we will not live backward. We will criticize emperors, revolutionaries, the Derg, the EPRDF, today's politicians, and tomorrow's before they have time to become comfortable. But we will not pretend that every national failure was created by one man in one palace.

We will laugh, because laughter can remove the perfume from nonsense.

We will remember, because a country that forgets repeats itself with new uniforms.

And we will work, because a joke is not a bridge, a laboratory, a school, a court, or a job.

The subject of this book is not who damaged Ethiopia. It is what your generation must build differently.

Keep the ladder.

Repair the steps.

Let people climb.

And when their time is finished, let them come down safely before they begin cutting the tree itself.

REMEMBER *A democracy is not only a way to climb into power. It is a safe way to climb back down.*

PART I

THE REPUBLIC OF VERY IMPORTANT PEOPLE

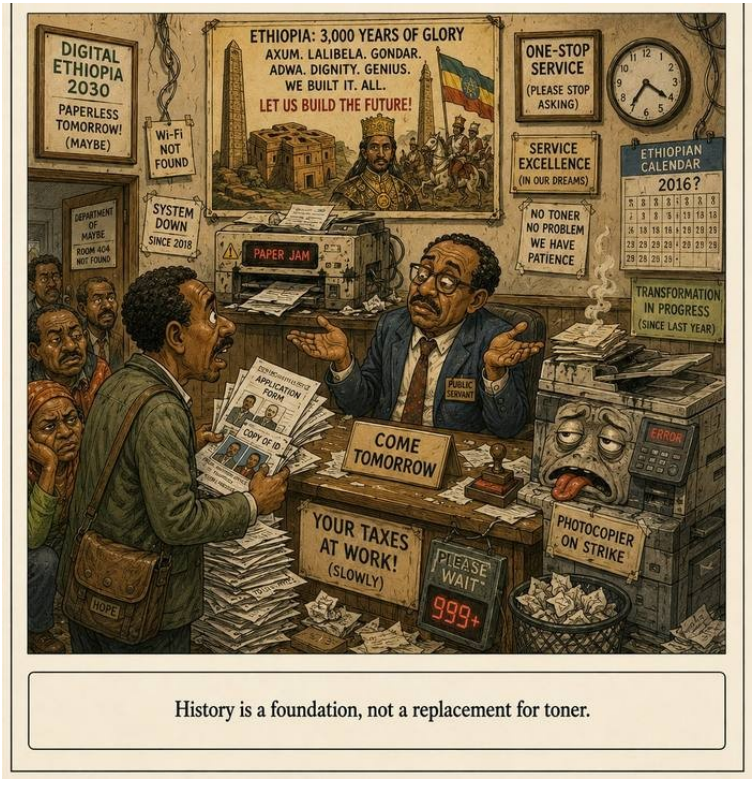
In this republic, every leader is a servant of the people and every servant requires a convoy.

Young Ethiopian, we begin inside a fictional African state whose institutions are weak but whose banners are printed in excellent color. The people are real enough to wait; the leaders are fictional enough to be safely ridiculous.

CHAPTER 1

Our Past Is Great. The Printer Is Still Broken

A national civilization meets a government office with no toner



Young Ethiopian, I know that your country is ancient. The clerk knows it too. Unfortunately, the printer does not. You enter a public office carrying a form, two photographs, three copies of your identification, a letter from another office, and the patience of a desert monk. Above the clerk hangs a poster declaring that Ethiopia is the cradle of

civilization. Below the poster sits a printer displaying the modern national motto: PAPER JAM.

The clerk looks at the machine. The machine looks at the clerk. Both seem to agree that you are the problem.

“Come tomorrow,” the clerk says, using the oldest surviving administrative language in the region. This is where national pride meets national performance. We are proud of old kingdoms, old faiths, old manuscripts, old victories, old music, and old coffee arguments that began before electricity. Pride is not wrong. A person without memory is easy to manipulate. But memory should be a foundation, not a mattress.

A hungry student cannot eat an ancient inscription. A laboratory cannot power its equipment with a speech about civilization. A farmer cannot irrigate a field using the phrase “three thousand years.” The words are impressive, but the water remains emotionally unmoved.

The Government Office as a Museum of Tomorrow

Our public offices often contain the future in framed slogans. DIGITAL ETHIOPIA. ONE-STOP SERVICE. CITIZEN-CENTERED TRANSFORMATION. The slogans are printed beautifully, perhaps by the private shop across the street, because the government printer is still discussing its constitutional role. The citizen asks for a simple document. The officer requests a document proving that the requested document is necessary. To obtain that proof, the citizen must visit the office that originally sent him here. The process is circular, which demonstrates that Ethiopia has mastered advanced geometry. By noon, the citizen has learned three lessons. First, every office has a stamp. Second, every stamp has a guardian. Third, the guardian is at lunch.

This book will not spend hundreds of pages retelling history. The question is not whether our ancestors were capable.

The question is whether we can make one office work before composing another anthem about capability.

Real pride is practical. It repairs the printer. It trains the clerk. It publishes the rule. It reduces the forms. It lets the citizen complete a lawful task without knowing somebody who knows somebody whose cousin controls the stamp.

A civilization should be old enough to know where the toner is kept.

Young Ethiopian, defend your history. Learn it. Correct lies about it. Celebrate it. Then close the history book for an afternoon and fix something that is broken today. The past can introduce you. Only present work can recommend you.

REMEMBER *National pride should make the printer work, not excuse why it does not.*

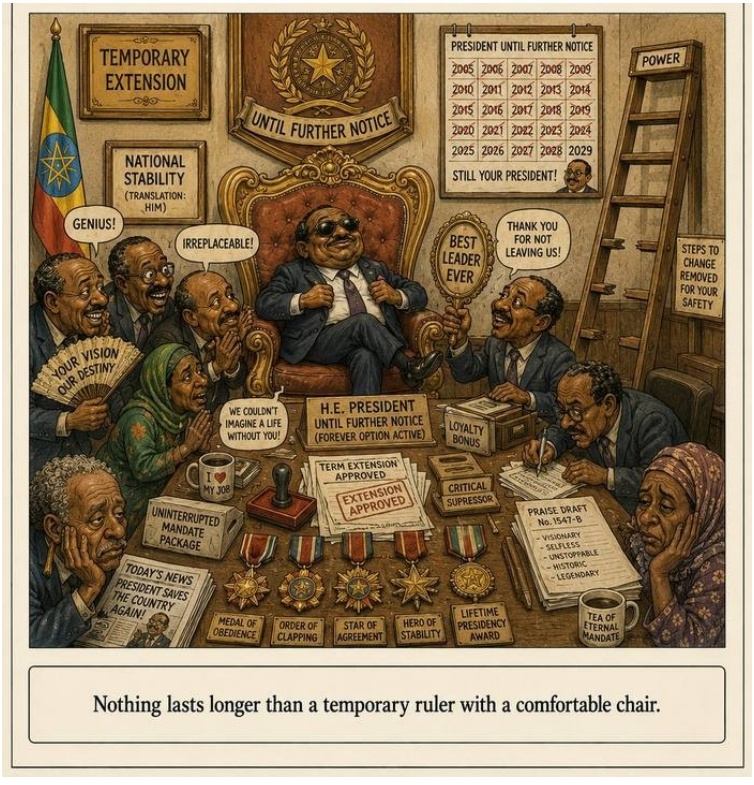
LETTER PAUSE

The next chapter introduces the man who has been temporarily president for so long that the word “temporary” now receives a pension.

CHAPTER 2

His Excellency President Until Further Notice

The temporary leader who became a permanent national weather condition



His Excellency President Until Further Notice did not plan to remain in power forever. Forever simply kept being extended for administrative reasons.

He first entered office during a national emergency. The emergency was serious. The constitution allowed temporary measures. The president looked directly into the camera

and promised that normal government would return as soon as conditions permitted.

Conditions, however, developed a strong personal attachment to him.

The first extension lasted six months. The second lasted one year. The third was called a transitional consolidation period. The fourth was not technically an extension because the calendar had been reinterpreted by a patriotic committee.

“I do not want power,” he explained from the presidential palace, where he had accidentally lived for twenty-seven years.

The Expansion of the Title

At first he was called Mr. President. Later he became His Excellency. Then His Excellency the Founding Father. Then His Excellency the Founding Father, Guardian of Stability, Protector of National Dialogue, Senior Patron of Youth Empowerment, and Temporary Coordinator of the Permanent Transition.

The title grew so long that the national broadcaster needed a commercial break before reaching his name.

Every year his advisers begged him to continue. This was not surprising: an adviser who recommends retirement may discover that he has also retired. So the advisers produced scientific evidence that the president was still essential. The evidence consisted mainly of interviews with the advisers.

When citizens asked who could replace him, the government answered, “Nobody.” This was presented as proof of his greatness. It was proof that he had governed for decades without allowing another person to become visible. A leader who stays too long creates the danger he uses to justify staying: institutions become personal, the army becomes loyal upward, the party becomes a family waiting room, and the courts learn the president’s facial expressions. When he finally considers leaving, every exit

looks dangerous, because he spent years making peaceful succession impossible. President Until Further Notice is funny because he is fictional. He is frightening because his habits are not.

The National Conversation About Retirement

One day a brave journalist asked whether he planned to retire. The president smiled kindly, the way a crocodile might smile at a scheduling question.

“The people will decide,” he said. The people had been trying to decide for years, but the ballot paper kept misplacing their answer.

Retirement should not be a national catastrophe. A former president should be able to plant trees, write memoirs, misremember meetings, give expensive speeches, and complain that the new generation has no discipline. That is a healthier ending than a coup, exile, prison, or a funeral attended by the entire cabinet because attendance is mandatory. The true achievement of a leader is not remaining necessary. It is building a country that continues without him.

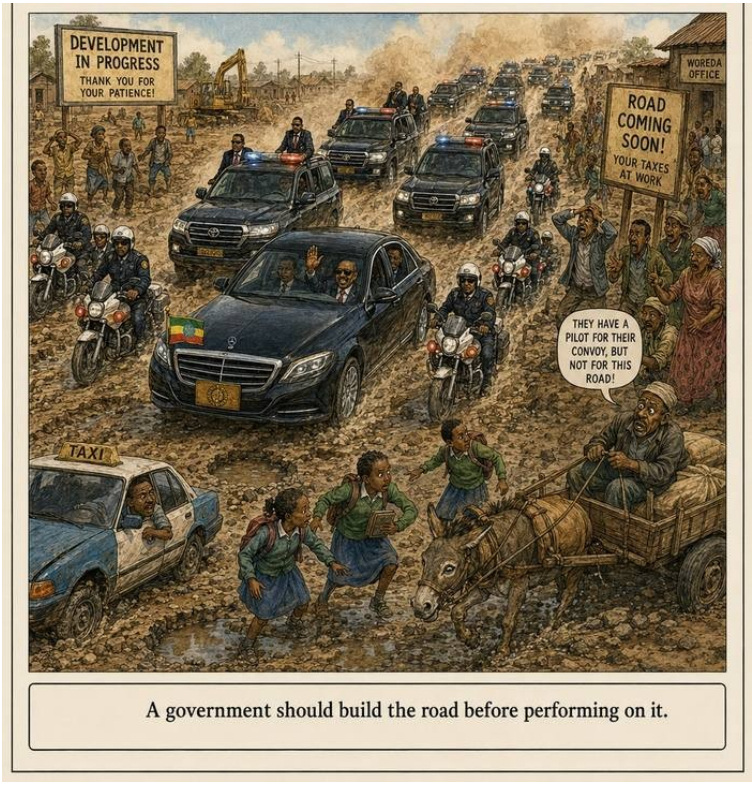
LETTER PAUSE

President Until Further Notice now leaves the palace in a convoy. The convoy is longer than the road budget.

CHAPTER 3

The Convoy That Arrived Before the Road

Thirty cars, twelve motorcycles, one leader, and zero functioning traffic lights


DEVELOPMENT IN PROGRESS
THANK YOU FOR YOUR PATIENCE!
WOREDA OFFICE
ROAD COMING SOON!
YOUR TAXES AT WORK
THEY HAVE A PILOT FOR THEIR CONVOY, BUT NOT FOR THIS ROAD!
TAXI
A government should build the road before performing on it.

A leader of our fictional republic can travel five kilometers with enough vehicles to invade a small parking lot.

First come the motorcycles, moving quickly and making the universal diplomatic sound: WEE-OOO, WEE-OOO, THE IMPORTANT PERSON IS APPROACHING. Then come police vehicles, security vehicles, communications vehicles, medical vehicles, vehicles carrying people whose only

known duty is being inside vehicles, and finally a black car containing one man who has recently given a speech about reducing government expenditure.

Traffic stops. A woman in labor waits. A student misses an examination. An ambulance becomes a citizen and is told to be patient.

The convoy does not move through traffic. Traffic is temporarily removed from history.

The leader looks through tinted glass at the road. The road has potholes. He is shocked. His convoy travels so fast, and the route is repaired so carefully before his visits, that he has never met the ordinary road in its natural habitat.

Development at Seventy Kilometers per Hour

Officials love inspection tours. Before the leader arrives, workers paint the curb, sweep the dust, plant flowers that are immediately instructed not to die, and move street vendors behind a temporary wall. The leader passes. He sees cleanliness, order, and three citizens waving flags with the determined enthusiasm of people whose names have been written down. The inspection lasts nine minutes. The press release is eleven pages.

A convoy creates distance in two ways. Physically, it keeps citizens away. Psychologically, it teaches the leader that his time is worth more than everybody else’s. If ten thousand people each lose twenty minutes so one official saves ten, the calculation is still called efficiency, because the official controls the calculator.

Security is real, and a sensible country protects its officials. But security can become theater, and theater becomes a declaration: one life inside the convoy matters more than every life waiting beside it.

The Road Opens After the Leader Leaves

The most revealing moment comes after the sirens disappear. The motorcycles are gone. The flowers begin

asking what happens next. The potholes return from temporary detention. The citizen resumes the journey that the state interrupted to demonstrate that the state is working.

A good leader should occasionally travel without the national earthquake — and see the queue, the broken traffic light, the overcrowded bus, the clinic without medicine, and the road that was not repainted because no camera was coming. A convoy can protect a leader from danger. It can also protect him from information.

Young Ethiopian, when you become important, do not measure your importance by how many ordinary people must stop moving so that you can move.

REMEMBER *The road is not successful because the president crossed it. It is successful when everybody can. LETTER PAUSE At the end of the convoy, a minister is waiting with scissors. Something is about to be opened for the fourth time.*

CHAPTER 4

The Minister Who Opened a Door That Was Already Open

The ribbon-cutting economy and the national shortage of scissors

The minister arrived to inaugurate a door.

The door had existed for three years. People had used it every day. But nobody important had cut a ribbon across it, so officially the door had been living without recognition. A red carpet was placed outside. A tent appeared. Plastic chairs multiplied. A banner announced THE GRAND OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE INTEGRATED ACCESS ENTRANCE.

Nobody was sure what this meant, but the font was very large.

The minister cut the ribbon. The door, relieved to be legal at last, remained a door.

Weak political systems confuse announcing work with doing work. A project begins with a launch. Then comes the launch of the implementation phase, the relaunch, the revitalization launch, and the high-level ceremony commemorating the first anniversary of the launch. The actual project waits politely outside.

The National Scissors Strategy

A ribbon ceremony has many advantages. It is visible. It is short. It produces photographs. A minister can stand beside a building, hold scissors, and create the impression that the building emerged from his jacket.

The engineers who designed it stand behind him. The workers who built it stand farther behind. The taxpayers are not invited because they are busy paying for the tent. Sometimes the project is not finished. This is no obstacle. The unfinished rooms are locked. The broken equipment is covered. The minister opens the front section, announces transformation, and leaves before transformation asks for spare parts.

A school may be inaugurated without teachers. A clinic may be opened without medicine. A factory may be launched without electricity. A website may be unveiled before anyone remembers the password. In each case the ceremony succeeds completely.

Open the Service, Not Only the Building

Buildings matter. But a building is not the service. A hospital is not the wall; it is trained staff, medicine, equipment, maintenance, records, cleanliness, and a patient who can receive care without calling a cousin. The ribbon is the easiest part of development. It has no salary, no

maintenance schedule, and no political opinion. A government should be judged six months after the ceremony, when the flowers are gone and the generator needs fuel.

Young Ethiopian, when someone cuts a ribbon, clap if you wish. Then return later and ask whether the thing works. REMEMBER: Opening a building is an event. Keeping it useful is government.

LETTER PAUSE

The minister has finished cutting. A committee will now investigate what the project was supposed to do.

The National Plan for Announcing National Plans

Vision 2030, Vision 2040, Vision 2050, and the missing Tuesday afternoon

The government launched a plan to coordinate the launch of future plans.

The new framework contained pillars, pathways, clusters, flagship initiatives, cross-cutting priorities, enabling environments, transformation accelerators, and a diagram with arrows pointing confidently in all directions. The plan promised middle-income status, upper-middle-income status, high-income status, global competitiveness, food security, industrialization, digitalization, green growth, blue growth, inclusive growth, and growth of the planning department.

The future was extremely organized. The present could not find the meeting room.

The Vision Industry

Long-term planning matters. The joke begins when the plan is treated as achievement before implementation begins. A new government creates a new plan because using the old

one might imply that somebody else once had an idea. The previous document is archived with the previous slogan.

Consultants return. Workshops occur. Hotels experience development.

The plan contains one hundred indicators. Nobody collects reliable data for eighty. Ten indicators are redefined. Five are classified. Four are exceeded by changing the baseline. One is the number of plans produced, which performs magnificently.

Tuesday Afternoon

Citizens live in Tuesday afternoon, not only in 2050. The farmer needs seed this season. The student needs a teacher this semester. The patient needs medicine today. A vision that cannot explain the next practical step becomes national wallpaper.

The future is not built by announcing it in a hotel. Good plans name trade-offs, costs, institutions, deadlines, responsible officials, and what will stop if the plan fails. They survive elections because they belong to the state, not to the ego of one administration.

Young Ethiopian, think long term. Then ask what happens next week.

REMEMBER *A vision without a budget, owner, deadline, and measurement is a wish wearing a tie.*

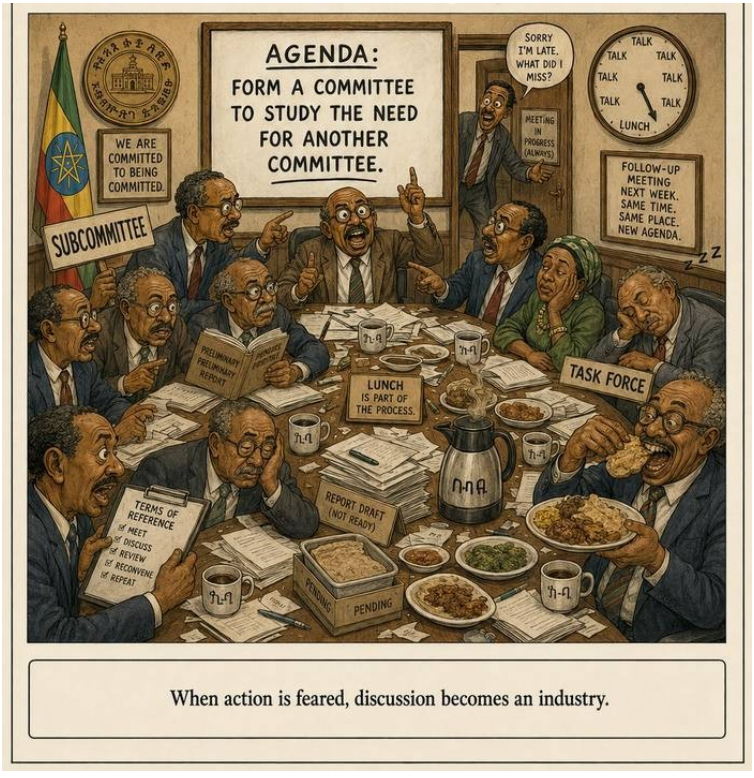
LETTER PAUSE

The plan launches a slogan. The slogan becomes more visible than the jobs it promises.

CHAPTER 5

The Committee for Establishing a Committee

How a problem becomes a meeting, a meeting becomes lunch, and lunch becomes policy



When a difficult problem enters a ministry of our fictional republic, it is immediately placed inside a committee for its own protection. The first meeting begins at ten. At eleven, several members arrive and apologize for being delayed by another meeting about punctuality. The chairperson reads the agenda. Item one is approval of the agenda. This

requires discussion because one member believes item one should be item two.

By lunchtime the committee has achieved consensus that the problem is serious. This is important progress because the citizens outside had mistakenly believed the problem was funny.

The committee does not solve the problem. It gives the problem minutes.

The Per Diem Theory of Government

Committees are useful when they bring expertise, coordinate institutions, hear evidence, and decide. But the fictional Republic of Very Important People has discovered another model: the committee as employment, shelter, travel opportunity, and a peaceful place where responsibility can disappear into a group photograph.

Nobody is personally responsible because everybody participated. The report uses the passive voice: mistakes were made, funds were misallocated, timelines were affected, and citizens were disappointed. By whom? The grammar refuses to testify.

A subcommittee is formed to identify the stakeholders. A technical working group is created to harmonize the findings. A high-level task force reviews the harmonization. An independent panel validates the task force. Finally, a consultant is hired to explain why nothing happened.

The consultant recommends another committee.

The Report That Became Furniture

After eighteen months, the committee produces a thick report. It has a glossy cover, a serious photograph, and a title containing the words integrated, sustainable, inclusive, strategic, and framework. The report is placed on a shelf, where it supports a broken table leg.

Meanwhile the original problem has grown. It now has children.

A competent state must sometimes meet. But every meeting should end with names, dates, budgets, and consequences. “We discussed” is not an outcome. It is what human beings do before an outcome. If nobody can be blamed for failure, nobody has truly been assigned the work.

Young Ethiopian, when you join a committee, ask the dangerous question: What exactly will be different on Monday? Watch the room become spiritual.

REMEMBER *A committee is useful only when responsibility enters with it and leaves with a name.*

LETTER PAUSE

The committee sends its recommendations to an adviser, who sends them to another adviser, who is waiting for advice.

The Adviser to the Adviser of the Adviser

How bad news is washed, ironed, perfumed, and delivered as excellent progress

The leader asks a simple question: “How is the country?” The first adviser knows that the country is having difficulties. The second adviser knows that the leader dislikes difficulties. The third adviser knows that the first two advisers enjoy their jobs.

So the answer begins a long journey.

Village: “There is no water.” District: “Water access faces temporary pressure.” Region: “Supply is stabilizing.” Ministry: “Major progress has been achieved.” Palace: “The people are grateful.”

By the time bad news reaches the leader, it has received a haircut, a new suit, and a medal.

The Palace Filter

Power attracts people who agree — some sincerely, some professionally. A leader may begin with intelligent advisers and end with a choir. The choir has one song: Your Excellency was correct before the question was asked. The most dangerous adviser is not always the corrupt one. It may be the frightened honest one, who sees the problem, understands the evidence, and then calculates the distance between truth and unemployment.

He chooses a phrase such as “implementation challenge,” which can describe anything from a missing signature to national collapse.

Leaders often say they want honest advice. What they mean is that they want honest advice delivered respectfully, privately, briefly, optimistically, and preferably by somebody else after the crisis has passed.

The Minister of Good News

In the Republic of Very Important People, one adviser is responsible for preventing facts from arriving unexpectedly. He studies the leader’s mood. If the leader is happy, the harvest is excellent. If the leader is angry, the harvest is under investigation.

The leader then makes decisions using information that has survived many layers of fear. He becomes angry when reality disobeys the briefing.

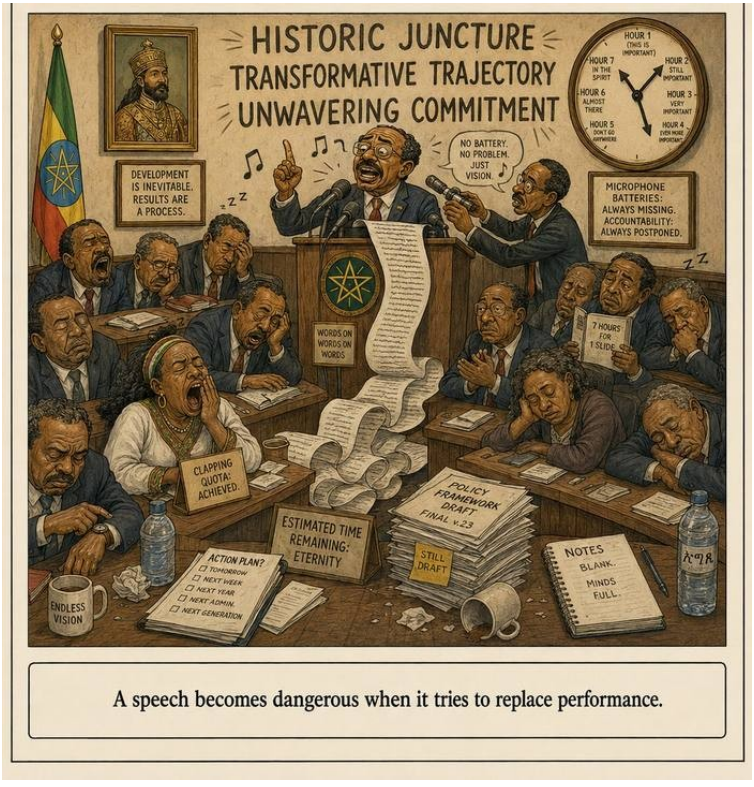
A leader surrounded by praise is not well informed. He is acoustically decorated.

Good institutions protect the messenger. They publish data, permit independent media, empower auditors, and make it possible to say “this policy failed” without immediately updating a passport. Young Ethiopian, if you advise power, do not become the soft pillow that helps it sleep through the fire alarm.

CHAPTER 6

The Speech That Needed a Lunch Break

Seven hours of national transformation and one missing microphone battery



The speech began in the morning and entered the afternoon without permission.

The leader thanked the chairperson, the deputy chairperson, the acting chairperson, the former chairperson, the organizing committee, the subcommittee, the elders, the youth, the women, the men, the invited

guests, the uninvited guests, and the people watching on television because the roads had been closed by the convoy.

Then he began the introduction.

By the time he reached point one, point one had grown old and moved abroad.

The Power of the Podium

A podium can change a human being. Before approaching it, the minister speaks normally. Behind it, his voice becomes slower, deeper, and full of phrases that sound important from a distance: historic juncture, irreversible momentum, transformative trajectory, inclusive prosperity, and the unwavering commitment of all relevant stakeholders. These phrases are excellent because they cannot be photographed failing.

The audience claps at regular intervals. Some clap from loyalty. Some clap because everyone else is clapping. One man claps because he has been asleep and believes something ended. Statistics appear. Production has increased by 147 percent, satisfaction has reached 93 percent, and the plan has been completed at 108 percent. Nobody asks how a plan can be more than complete. Mathematics has been asked to support national unity.

When the Electricity Goes Out

Halfway through the speech, the electricity fails. The microphone dies. For one brief moment, the country experiences silence.

The leader continues speaking because leaders of this type do not require electricity. They generate their own current through confidence.

A speech can inspire, explain, mourn, persuade, and unite. But words must carry evidence and lead to action. A government that replaces performance with speeches eventually creates citizens who can recognize a lie by its

opening ceremony. The longer the speech, the more carefully you should inspect the budget.

Young Ethiopian, learn to speak clearly. Say what happened, what will happen, who is responsible, how much it costs, and when the public can check. Then sit down before your adjectives form a ministry.

REMEMBER *A speech should explain the work. It should not become the work.*

LETTER PAUSE

The speech ends. The election begins. Fortunately, the correct answer has already been printed.

When the Microphone Became a Personality

A speech can become longer because the microphone never asks for evidence

The microphone has one serious weakness.

It cannot interrupt.

This is why some leaders love it more than advisers, journalists, experts, or citizens. The microphone receives every sentence with equal respect. It does not ask for a source. It does not compare last year's promise with this year's result. It never says, "That was not my question."

After many years together, the leader and microphone become emotionally close.

The leader begins a speech about irrigation. Forty minutes later he is discussing enemies, childhood, national destiny, and the historical significance of his recent visit to a warehouse. The audience has entered a different season.

Applause becomes a survival skill.

One official starts clapping before the sentence ends and is promoted for foresight.

Political speech matters. But speech becomes dangerous when it replaces evidence. A government announces transformation: ask what changed. A party announces unity: ask who can disagree. A minister announces jobs: ask how many, where, at what wage, and for how long. A leader announces peace: ask whether prisoners, displaced families, and armed forces experience it. The microphone magnifies sound. It does not magnify truth.

Young Ethiopian, learn to listen for structure rather than excitement.

What is the claim?

What evidence supports it?

What is the time frame?

Who is responsible?

How will failure be measured?

What trade-off is being hidden?

Who was not invited to speak?

These questions are not disrespect. They are citizenship. Authoritarian culture confuses silence with respect: a young person who asks a precise question is accused of arrogance, and an older official who gives a vague answer is praised for wisdom. The hierarchy protects length from accuracy.

Universities catch the same disease. A speaker with a title occupies two hours and leaves no time for questions. The event is called a dialogue. The dialogue consists of one person speaking and many people developing private opinions.

The problem is not technology. It is the belief that status should protect a claim from examination. A healthy public culture gives the microphone a partner: the question. Press conferences should contain questions not chosen for comfort. Parliament should allow opposition. Public meetings should publish minutes. Experts should be able to correct officials.

Satire

Satire is useful because it shrinks the microphone back to its proper size. When citizens laugh at inflated language, they recover distance from power. The leader becomes human again. The speech loses its spell.

This is why insecure governments dislike jokes. A joke can cross a checkpoint without showing identification. But humor also carries responsibility: false accusations are not satire, ethnic insults are not courage, and mocking poverty is not speaking truth to power. The best political humor aims upward — at pretension, hypocrisy, and abuse.

The microphone should remain a tool.

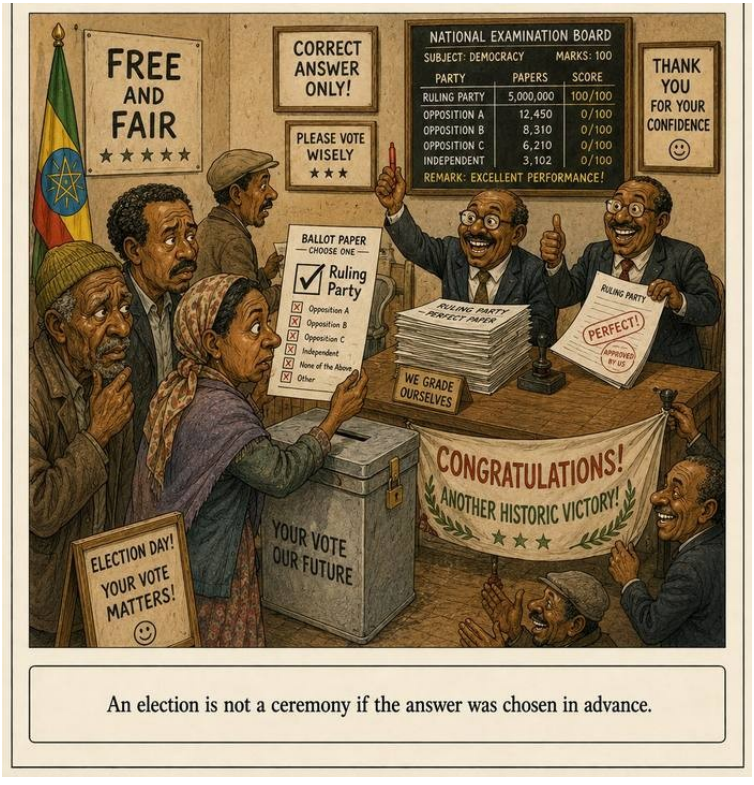
When it becomes a personality, the country begins listening to volume rather than results.

REMEMBER *Every important speech deserves a question, a number, a deadline, and the freedom to laugh when the words become larger than reality.*

CHAPTER 7

The Election With One Correct Answer

A national examination in which the government marks its own paper



The Republic of Very Important People believes deeply in elections. It holds them regularly, wins them consistently, and investigates citizens who appear surprised.

The ballot paper contains several parties. One is the ruling party. Another supports the ruling party from a different chair. A third party exists to prove that opposition is legal.

Its leader appears on television every five years and agrees that the government has made excellent progress.

The election offers choice in the same way a restaurant offers choice between tea and tea in a different cup.

Campaign Season

During campaign season, the ruling party suddenly remembers villages. Roads are graded. Electricity poles appear. Officials visit markets. The president hugs children with the careful technique of a person who has received a briefing. State television gives equal time. The government receives two hours. The opposition receives twelve minutes at 2:17 in the morning, immediately after a documentary about soil moisture. Public employees attend rallies voluntarily. Their names are voluntarily recorded. Buses voluntarily transport them. The banners are voluntarily identical.

On election day the president urges citizens to vote freely. Security vehicles are parked nearby to protect the freedom from wandering.

The Result Nobody Predicted Except Everybody

The ruling party wins 99.8 percent. Officials celebrate the strength of democracy. Foreign observers use diplomatic language such as “orderly” and “areas of concern.” The national broadcaster explains that the remaining 0.2 percent demonstrates pluralism.

A genuine election is not a ceremony for confirming a leader. It is a mechanism for uncertainty. The government must be able to lose. The opposition must be able to campaign, organize, count, challenge, and eventually govern. The citizen must be able to vote without calculating who will know. An election whose winner cannot lose is not a choice. It is applause with paperwork.

Democracy is noisy and inconvenient. It produces criticism, coalition, delay, and the terrible possibility that somebody

you dislike may win. That inconvenience is the point. Peaceful uncertainty is cheaper than violent certainty. Young Ethiopian, do not ask only whether an election occurred. Ask whether power could actually change hands.

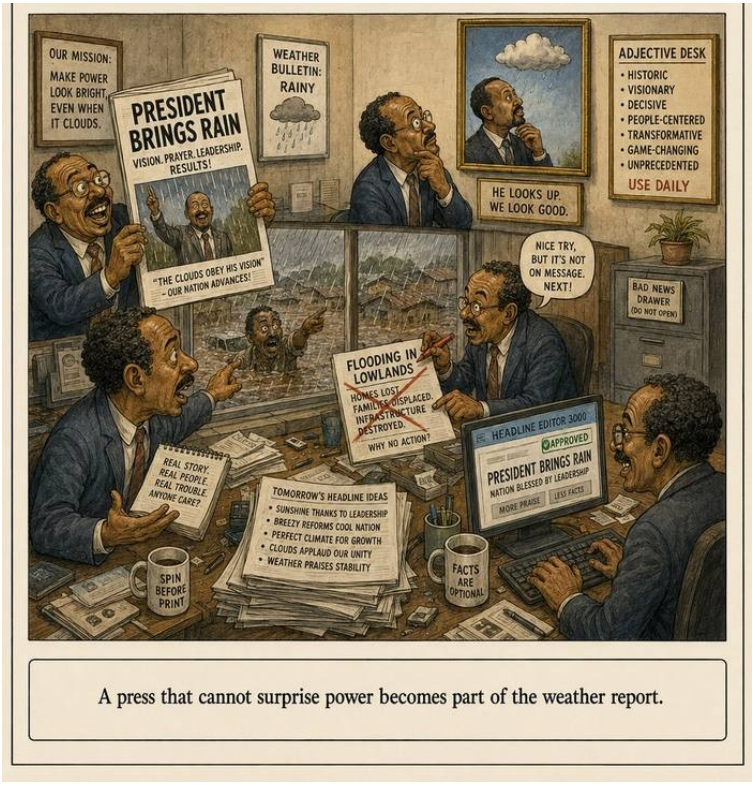
LETTER PAUSE

The national newspaper reports the result beneath a headline praising the president for the sunrise.

CHAPTER 8

The Newspaper That Praised the Weather

Independent journalism, provided the weather agrees with the government


OUR MISSION:
MAKE POWER LOOK BRIGHT, EVEN WHEN IT CLOUDS.
PRESIDENT BRINGS RAIN
VISION. PRAYER. LEADERSHIP. RESULTS!
"THE CLOUDS OBEY HIS VISION" – OUR NATION ADVANCES!
WEATHER BULLETIN: RAINY
ADJECTIVE DESK
• HISTORIC
• VISIONARY
• DECISIVE
• PEOPLE-CENTERED
• TRANSFORMATIVE
• GAME-CHANGING
• UNPRECEDENTED
USE DAILY
HE LOOKS UP. WE LOOK GOOD.
NICE TRY, BUT IT'S NOT ON MESSAGE. NEXT!
BAD NEWS DRAWER (DO NOT OPEN)
FLOODING IN LOWLANDS
HOMES LOST. FAMILIES DISPLACED. INFRASTRUCTURE DESTROYED.
WHY NO ACTION?
HEADLINE EDITOR 3000
APPROVED
PRESIDENT BRINGS RAIN
NATION BLESSED BY LEADERSHIP
MORE PRAISE
LESS FACTS
REAL STORY. REAL PEOPLE. REAL TROUBLE. ANYONE CARE?
TOMORROW'S HEADLINE IDEAS
• SUNSHINE THANKS TO LEADERSHIP
• BREEZY REFORMS COOL NATION
• PERFECT CLIMATE FOR GROWTH
• CLOUDS APPLAUD OUR UNITY
• WEATHER PRAISES STABILITY
SPIN BEFORE PRINT
FACTS ARE OPTIONAL
A press that cannot surprise power becomes part of the weather report.

The morning headline read: PRESIDENT BRINGS RAIN TO AGRICULTURAL SECTOR.

The rain had been falling for three days. The president was in another country. This did not reduce his contribution. The article explained that the rainfall reflected the government's commitment to moisture. A photograph showed the minister of agriculture looking thoughtfully at a cloud.

When the rain later caused flooding, the newspaper blamed illegal drainage activity by hostile elements. State media in the Republic of Very Important People employs many talented journalists. Unfortunately, several are assigned to the Adjective Department. Their job is to ensure that every presidential action is historic, visionary, decisive, unprecedented, people-centered, and warmly welcomed. If the leader opens a clinic, it is a historic clinic. If he visits a farm, the corn becomes strategic. If he sneezes, the newsroom confirms that citizens across the nation have welcomed the sneeze.

The journalist learns to interview the public carefully. The first citizen says, “We are grateful.” The second says, “We are extremely grateful.” The third asks about water and is removed during editing for lack of gratitude.

News That Cannot Surprise Power

A government that controls the news loses a source of intelligence. The press is not useful because it makes leaders happy. It is useful because it tells them what their own advisers hide. When journalists fear arrest, dismissal, or mysterious administrative attention, they begin writing around facts, and the country fills with rumors because verified information has been placed under national protection.

A newspaper that never embarrasses power is not informing the president. It is decorating breakfast. Independent journalism can be irresponsible, inaccurate, and unfair; the answer is correction, evidence, professional standards, and law applied by independent courts — not turning every criticism into a security threat. A country needs journalists who can report both the rain and the leaking roof.

REMEMBER *When every headline praises the leader, the truth moves to the rumor market.*

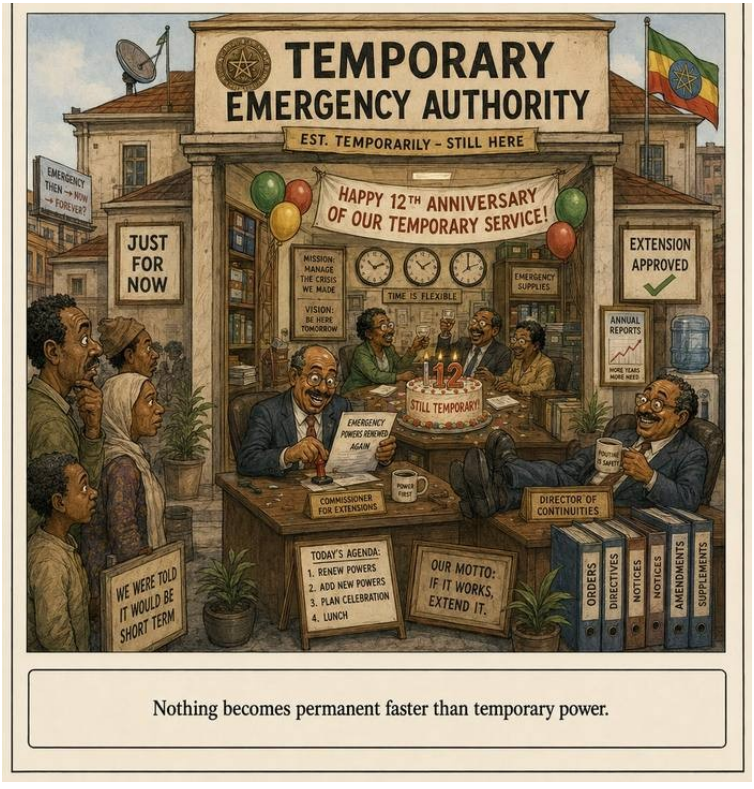
LETTER PAUSE

The newspaper assures citizens that the emergency is temporary. The emergency has just opened a permanent office.

CHAPTER 9

The National Emergency With a Permanent Office

Temporary measures, permanent buildings, and an anniversary celebration



The emergency began suddenly and ended gradually, so gradually that nobody noticed it had moved into a government building.

At first the measures were necessary for thirty days. Then ninety. Then until stability returned. Stability approached the border, saw the paperwork, and turned back.

The temporary emergency office now has six floors, a cafeteria, a pension plan, and a bronze plaque commemorating ten years of temporary service. Emergencies simplify government. Parliament becomes inconvenient. Courts become slow. Journalists become dangerous. Procurement becomes urgent. Citizens are told that questions can resume after the crisis, while the crisis receives another budget.

A leader may face real threats: war, terrorism, epidemic, disaster, attempted coup. Exceptional powers may be necessary. But exceptional powers are delicious. They taste like speed, secrecy, and freedom from explanation. Soon every problem can be connected to security: a labor protest affects productivity, productivity affects the economy, the economy affects stability, stability affects security — therefore the labor protest is a national security matter, and the workers are invited to discuss wages with people carrying rifles.

The Calendar of Permanent Temporariness

Each extension is announced reluctantly. The president appears tired, as though citizens personally forced him to continue enjoying exceptional authority.

Officials promise review. The review is classified. Parliament approves the extension after a vigorous debate in which every speaker agrees.

A healthy constitution defines the emergency, limits its time, requires evidence, preserves non-derogable rights, permits judicial review, and forces public justification. Otherwise temporary power becomes ordinary power wearing a helmet. A government that cannot govern without emergency powers has converted failure into a legal category. Young Ethiopian, during a genuine crisis, support necessary action — but keep asking when, why, how long, under what law, reviewed by whom, and with what exit.

REMEMBER *A temporary power without an expiration date*

is a permanent temptation.

LETTER PAUSE

Inside the permanent emergency office hangs a presidential portrait. The portrait has been working harder than the ministry.

INTERLUDE

A Government Memorandum

Circulated to all offices. Not to be read.

OFFICE OF THE PERMANENT TEMPORARY COMMITTEE — INTERNAL MEMORANDUM No. 4,117

TO: All Ministries, Sub-Ministries, and Persons Holding a Stamp

FROM: The Adviser to the Adviser (Acting, since 2009)

SUBJECT: Rescheduling of Tomorrow

1. It has come to the attention of this office that Tomorrow was previously scheduled to occur immediately after Today. Following consultation, Tomorrow has been rescheduled. A new date will be announced at a launch event, tea provided.

2. Citizens holding appointments for Tomorrow are advised that their appointments remain valid and will be honored on Tomorrow, whenever it is held.

3. All offices are reminded that the word “Temporary” must be printed on all signage in permanent paint. Budget for permanent paint has been approved on a temporary basis.

4. The Committee for Establishing a Committee has established a sub-committee to review this memorandum. The sub-committee will report to the Committee, which will report to itself.

5. Requests to know where the toner is kept should be submitted in triplicate. Toner for the triplicate is not currently available. See Item 1.

6. Any office that has completed a task is asked to stop, as completion has not been included in this year’s plan and may create an audit.

This memorandum is effective immediately, pending confirmation, subject to review, until further notice.

— Stamped (spiritually).

Questions for Your Generation

Three questions to argue about before the next part.

1. What is the difference between a leader who is popular and a leader who is accountable? Can one person be both?

2. The book says power “has the same appetite in every climate.” Find one example of an oversized chair in a country you admire.

3. Rewrite one government announcement you have heard so that it reports a result instead of a plan.

PART II

MINISTRIES, MOTORCADES, AND OTHER NATURAL DISASTERS

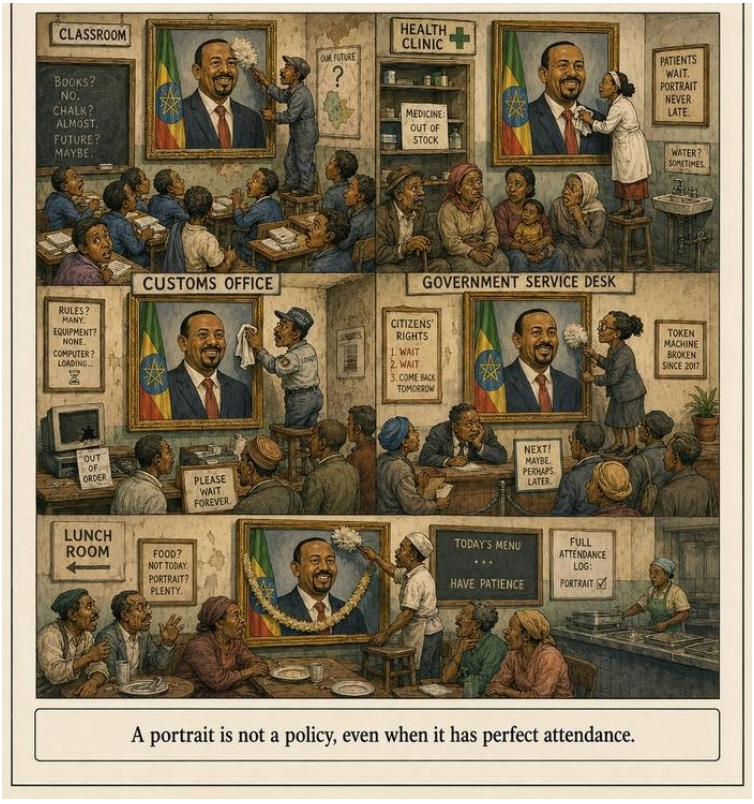
The government is extremely busy. This should not be confused with the country moving.

The first part introduced the president. This part introduces the machinery around him: portraits, relatives, commissions, generals, ministers, apps, plans, slogans, and the official science of explaining why the citizen should return tomorrow.

CHAPTER 10

The President’s Portrait Is Working Hard

A framed leader supervises classrooms, clinics, customs offices, and lunch


CLASSROOM
BOOKS? NO. CHALK? ALMOST. FUTURE? MAYBE.
OUR FUTURE ?
HEALTH CLINIC
MEDICINE: OUT OF STOCK
PATIENTS WAIT. PORTRAIT NEVER LATE.
WATER? SOMETIMES.
CUSTOMS OFFICE
RULES? MANY. EQUIPMENT? NONE. COMPUTER? LOADING...
"OUT OF ORDER"
PLEASE WAIT FOREVER.
GOVERNMENT SERVICE DESK
CITIZENS' RIGHTS 1. WAIT 2. WAIT 3. COME BACK TOMORROW
TOKEN MACHINE BROKEN SINCE 2017
NEXT! MAYBE. PERHAPS. LATER.
LUNCH ROOM
FOOD? NOT TODAY. PORTRAIT? PLENTY.
TODAY'S MENU
HAVE PATIENCE
FULL ATTENDANCE LOG: PORTRAIT ☑
A portrait is not a policy, even when it has perfect attendance.

The president may not be present, but his portrait has perfect attendance.

It hangs in the school, the clinic, the police station, the ministry, the airport, the court, the conference hall, and the office where citizens are told the photocopier is broken. The

portrait watches everything with the calm confidence of a man whose frame has never stood in a queue.

In one district office the portrait is larger than the national map. This is useful because citizens should know where the country is located: directly below the president.

The wall has one leader, two flags, three slogans, and no public notice explaining the citizen's rights. Government by Interior Decoration Portraits are normal. Countries display presidents, monarchs, founders, and symbols. The joke begins when the image becomes a substitute for the institution. The clinic lacks medicine, but the portrait is dusted daily. The school lacks books, but the frame has imported glass.

A new leader arrives. Thousands of portraits must be replaced. This creates employment in printing, framing, transportation, installation, and the careful removal of yesterday's eternal leader.

The old portrait disappears overnight. Citizens who praised it on Monday praise the new one on Tuesday. Their necks are politically flexible.

The Leader Who Is Everywhere Except Accountable

Personal rule depends on presence. Every achievement becomes the leader's gift. Every road is his road. Every scholarship is his kindness. Every rain cloud receives his approval. Institutions shrink until the president appears to carry the country in his jacket.

This is flattering and dangerous. When citizens believe one person provides everything, they stop demanding systems. When the person leaves, the system discovers it has forgotten how to stand.

A strong leader builds institutions that do not require his photograph to function.

Young Ethiopian, respect public office. Do not worship the officeholder. A portrait should identify the president, not replace the constitution.

REMEMBER *The leader's face should not be the operating system of the state.*

LETTER PAUSE

The portrait is joined by several relatives, all of whom have recently discovered a passion for public service.

The Airport Named After Someone Still Alive

How modest leaders prepare their monuments before breakfast

President Until Further Notice was a humble man. This is why the airport, university, stadium, dam, boulevard, hospital, youth center, and national chicken-breeding institute carried his name.

The president objected at first. He said the honor was too great. The cabinet insisted. The cabinet had been appointed by the president and was famous for independent insistence.

The country did not have a personality cult. It had a very enthusiastic naming coincidence.

Immortality Before Retirement

Leaders often want to control memory while they still control the budget. A monument is built. A biography is assigned to schools. The leader's birthday becomes a development week. Children learn that national history was waiting patiently until he arrived.

This creates an awkward problem when the leader later falls. The airport must be renamed. The signs change. The textbooks change. The new government opens a Museum of Previous Excess inside the former Presidential Excellence

Center. A mature country honors leaders after time, evidence, debate, and distance. It also honors scientists, teachers, artists, farmers, soldiers, nurses, builders, and citizens whose work does not arrive with sirens.

The Road With Three Names

One boulevard has been renamed by three governments. Older citizens use the first name, officials use the current name, taxi drivers use the landmark, and GPS has resigned. Names matter because memory matters. But memory should not change every time a new leader feels underdecorated.

A leader confident in his work can allow the future to decide what deserves his name.

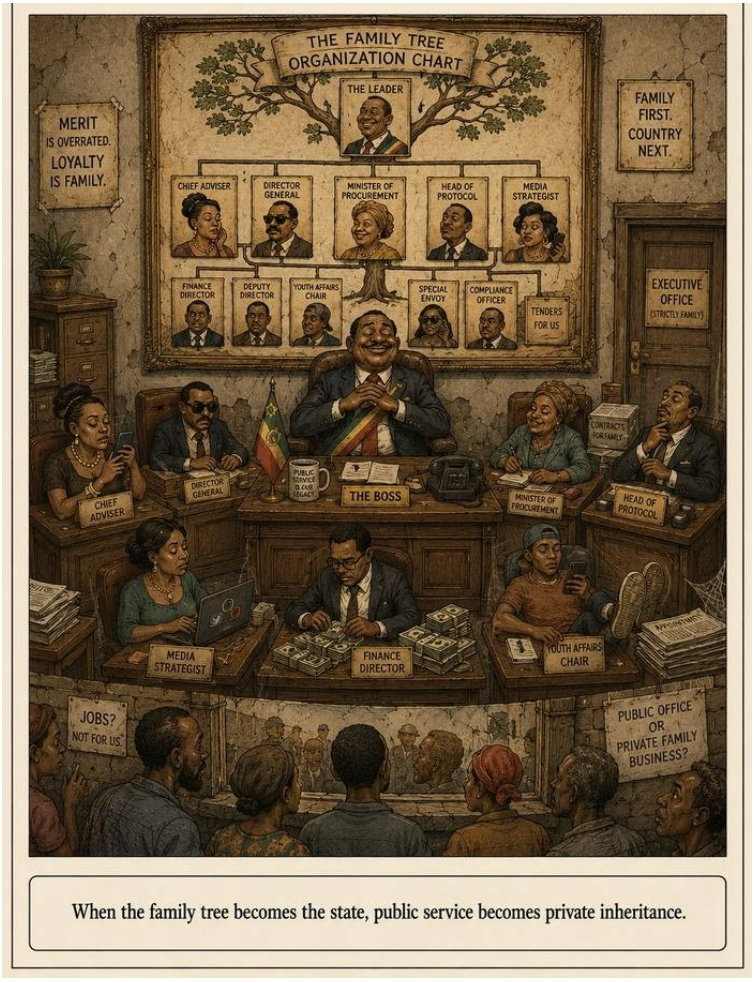
Young Ethiopian, do not build your monument while citizens are still waiting for the service the monument celebrates.

REMEMBER *The most durable monument is an institution that still works after the nameplate is removed. LETTER PAUSE The president now launches a national plan explaining what every renamed building will accomplish by 2050.*

CHAPTER 11

The First Family Discovers Public Service

When the family tree becomes the government organization chart



Shortly after the president took office, an extraordinary genetic event occurred: several members of his family became uniquely qualified to govern.

His brother understood transport. His cousin understood customs. His daughter understood national youth. His nephew understood procurement, especially procurement involving his own company. An uncle who had never shown interest in agriculture developed a sudden concern for fertilizer imports.

Merit, it appeared, was hereditary.

The Family Meeting Becomes Cabinet

Every leader needs people he trusts. Politics can be dangerous, institutions weak, and betrayal common. Family may provide loyalty. But loyalty without competence becomes expensive, and loyalty without accountability becomes ownership. The fictional president explains that his relatives are citizens too. This is true. They are citizens with unusually short application processes.

The first daughter launches a foundation. The foundation receives land, publicity, security, and donations from businesspeople who independently concluded that generosity is good for licensing.

The first cousin becomes ambassador to a country whose language he does not speak. He reassures parliament that he has watched several travel videos.

The Public Purse at a Family Wedding

Nepotism is not always obvious. The relative may be capable. The appointment may be legal. The danger is the absence of fair competition and independent review. When family, party, business, military, and state become one network, public money begins attending private events.

Citizens cannot know whether a contract was awarded because it was best or because the contractor shares a grandmother with the minister.

A family can love the country. It should not inherit the invoice.

Good systems require transparent appointments, conflict-of interest rules, asset disclosure, competitive procurement, independent audit, and consequences that do not stop at the palace gate.

Young Ethiopian, when you gain authority, do not confuse trust with blood relation. The public office is not an extra room in the family house.

REMEMBER *The state is not a family business, even when the family is very patriotic.*

LETTER PAUSE

To prove its seriousness about corruption, the government now opens a magnificent anti-corruption headquarters.

The Anti-Corruption Office's Marble Lobby

Fighting theft from a building whose invoice has gone missing

The new Anti-Corruption Commission headquarters had imported marble, tinted glass, leather chairs, and a fountain shaped like public integrity.

The opening ceremony cost more than the annual budget of three rural clinics. This demonstrated the government's determination to fight waste visibly.

The commissioner gave a speech declaring zero tolerance. Behind him, a contractor quietly tolerated several zeros.

The building was transparent. The procurement process was not.

The Small Fish Aquarium

Anti-corruption campaigns often begin with dramatic arrests. A junior clerk is caught accepting a small bribe.

Cameras arrive. Handcuffs appear. The country is assured that nobody is above the law.

The larger official, meanwhile, attends an integrity conference in another country.

Corruption survives when enforcement is selective. The law catches enemies, minor employees, and people without powerful relatives. Friends receive warnings. Allies receive transfers. Senior figures receive committees.

This teaches citizens a terrible lesson: corruption is not stealing public money; corruption is stealing public money without political protection.

The Form for Reporting the Person Who Controls the

Form A citizen who reports corruption must submit evidence to the office connected to the official being reported. The complaint travels through several desks and eventually arrives on the official's desk, where it experiences a conflict of interest and dies peacefully.

Real anti-corruption work is less dramatic. It requires simple procurement rules, open contracts, digital records, independent auditors, protected whistleblowers, free media, professional courts, asset declarations, and systems that reduce discretionary power.

The strongest anti-corruption policy is not a poster saying DO NOT STEAL. It is a system that makes stealing difficult, visible, and punishable.

Young Ethiopian, beware of leaders who fight corruption mainly through speeches about the corruption of their opponents.

REMEMBER *An anti-corruption office is credible only when its door opens upward as well as downward.*

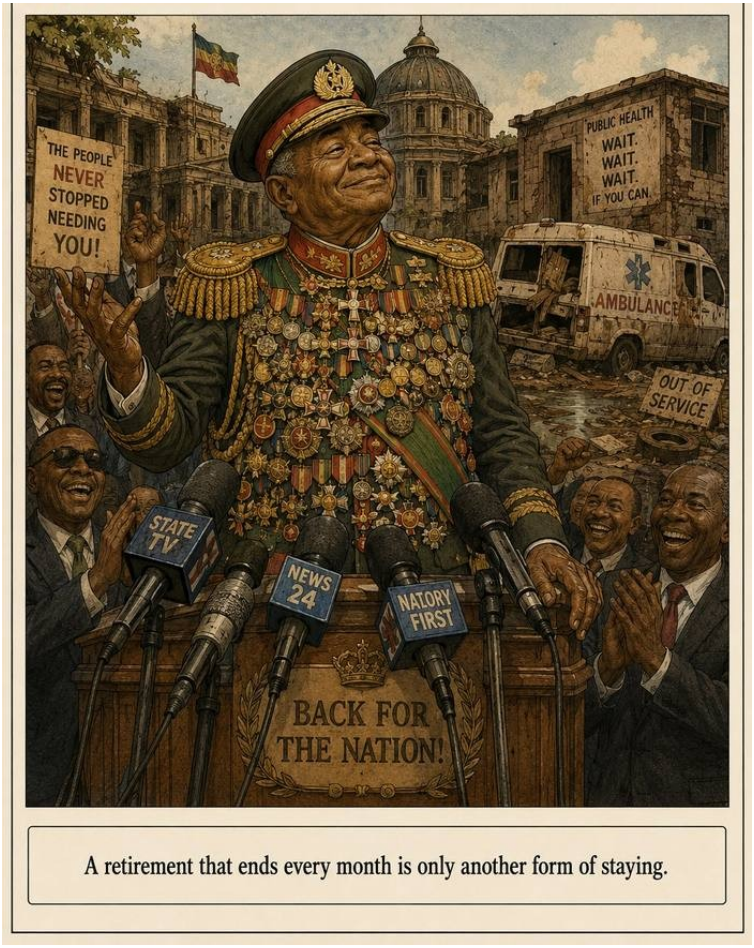
LETTER PAUSE

The commission invites a retired general to speak. The general has retired seven times and remains on active retirement duty.

CHAPTER 12

The General Who Retired From Retirement

A uniform with more medals than the country has functioning ambulances



General Permanently Available announced his retirement with great dignity. The following month he returned to save the nation from the dangerous uncertainty of his retirement.

He had served under four governments, three constitutions, two national flags, and one unchanging belief: the country was safest when he was near a microphone.

His uniform carried so many medals that younger officers assumed he had personally defeated weather.

The general did not enter politics. Politics had been ordered to report to him.

When the Barracks Becomes a Shortcut

Armies are necessary. Soldiers defend the state and may sacrifice everything for citizens they never meet. That duty deserves respect. The problem begins when military command is treated as a qualification for permanent civilian rule. A general is trained to command. Democracy requires persuasion, compromise, criticism, legal limits, and the possibility that a civilian with no medals may say no. In the fictional republic, the general promises only a brief transition. He suspends politics to protect democracy from politicians. He bans protests until citizens learn freedom responsibly. He creates a timetable whose dates are classified for national security.

The Civilian Suit Over the Uniform

Eventually the general removes his uniform and forms a political party. The party headquarters contains many former colonels who have independently developed identical political ideas.

The election campaign is peaceful. The opposition is free to organize as long as it does not confuse freedom with competing.

A civilian suit does not automatically demobilize the habit of command.

A healthy state keeps the military professional, politically neutral, accountable to lawful civilian authority, and respected precisely because it does not become another party. Young Ethiopian, honor soldiers. Do not ask them to

become the constitution. A country protected by the army should not be owned by it.

REMEMBER *The uniform defends the state best when it does not become the state.*

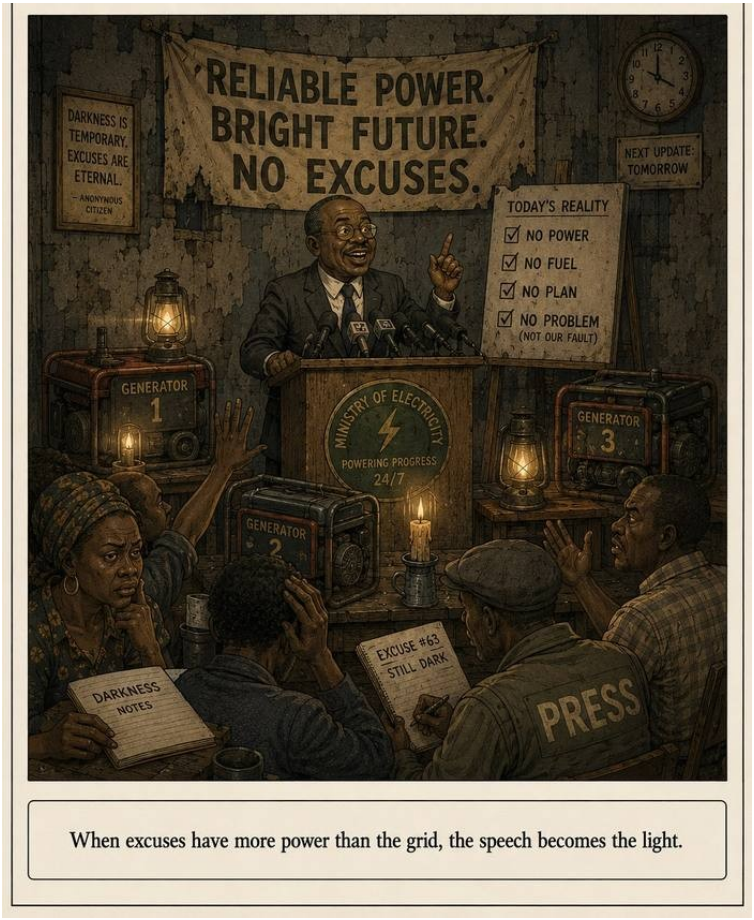
LETTER PAUSE

The general leaves the stage. The lights go out. The minister of electricity explains that darkness is evidence of increased demand.

CHAPTER 13

The Minister of Electricity Explains the Darkness

A press conference illuminated by three generators and one national excuse



The lights went out during the minister’s speech about reliable electricity.

Nobody panicked. The journalists had brought flashlights. The ministry had brought a generator. The citizens had brought experience.

When the lights returned, the minister explained that the outage was caused by the success of the electricity program. So many people now wanted electricity that the system could not provide it. This was described as a positive challenge.

The country had entered a new stage of development in which demand was fully electrified and supply remained traditional.

The National Excuse Grid

Every sector has explanations. Drought. Rain. Global markets. Local markets. Previous governments. Future governments. Illegal connections. Legal disconnections. Citizens using electricity at night without appreciating the strategic pressure this creates.

Some explanations are true. Power systems are expensive and technically difficult. Generation, transmission, distribution, maintenance, pricing, theft, investment, and regulation all matter. But explanation becomes comedy when it never produces accountability.

The minister announces a new dam, a new grid, a new partnership, and a new target year. Citizens write the target year beside the previous target year and begin collecting them.

The Generator Economy

Businesses buy generators. Clinics buy generators. Wealthy homes buy generators. Poor families buy candles. The national grid becomes a suggestion, while imported fuel quietly becomes the minister of industry.

Unreliable electricity is not merely inconvenience. It damages equipment, raises business costs, spoils medicine,

interrupts study, limits digital services, and teaches investors to carry backup plans larger than their companies.

A development plan without reliable electricity is a PowerPoint presentation in the dark.

Young Ethiopian, demand technical honesty. Publish outages. Measure losses. maintain equipment. Price fairly. Protect the poor transparently. Reward competence. Stop announcing megawatts that citizens cannot meet at the wall socket.

REMEMBER *Electricity is not generated by optimism, although optimism does consume very little fuel.*

LETTER PAUSE

The ministry responds by launching a mobile application. The village still has no water, internet, or mobile signal.

The Government App for the Village Without Water

Digital transformation arrives carrying a password nobody remembers

The village asked for water. The ministry gave it an app. The app was called AquaConnect Citizen Empowerment Platform 2.0. It allowed residents to report the absence of water by uploading a photograph of the water that was absent. Registration required an email address, a national identification number, a six-digit verification code, and reliable internet. The village had none of these, but the launch ceremony had excellent Wi-Fi.

The minister pressed a digital button. The screen displayed SUCCESS. The women returned to carrying containers.

Modernity as Decoration

Technology can transform government. Digital payments, records, licensing, education, health, agriculture, and public

data can reduce corruption and save time. But technology applied without infrastructure can become a new layer of exclusion.

The official loves the app because it appears modern. The citizen loves water because it appears in a cup. A poorly designed digital service simply moves the queue onto a screen. The citizen now waits online, receives an error message, visits the office, and is told to solve the problem through the app.

The Password Is National Security

The district administrator has forgotten the password. The only employee who knows it attended training and was transferred. The reset email goes to an account created by a consultant whose contract ended.

Meanwhile the ministry reports that ninety percent of districts have been digitally connected because the software was installed on ninety percent of district computers. Whether the computers turn on is a separate indicator scheduled for phase two.

Technology should remove a barrier, not place the barrier behind glass and call it innovation.

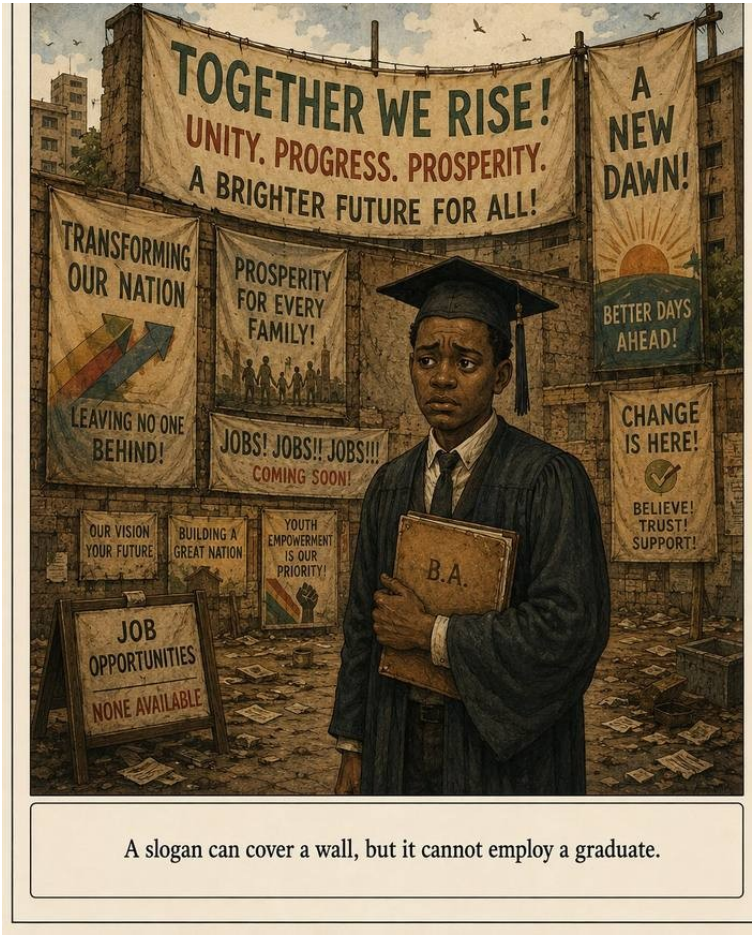
Young Ethiopian, build digital systems. But begin with the citizen’s reality. Electricity, connectivity, language, literacy, accessibility, privacy, maintenance, support, and a non-digital alternative all matter.

REMEMBER *A smart government is not one with the most apps. It is one that solves the citizen’s actual problem. LETTER PAUSE The app is renamed after the president, who has also named the airport, university, stadium, and chicken farm after himself.*

CHAPTER 14

The Country With More Slogans Than Jobs

Prosperity on the banner, unemployment under the banner



The graduate stood beneath a banner reading YOUTH ARE THE ENGINE OF DEVELOPMENT. He had been unemployed long enough to need an oil change.

The city was full of slogans. UNITY. PROSPERITY. TRANSFORMATION. NEW DAWN. HOMEGROWN REFORM. NATIONAL RENEWAL. The words were printed on walls, buses, office entrances, conference folders, and shirts worn by people waiting for jobs.

The economy had not created enough employment, but the slogan sector was booming.

The Banner Economy

A slogan is useful when it summarizes a real strategy. It becomes dangerous when it replaces one. Citizens are asked to repeat the phrase instead of asking how jobs will be created, businesses financed, electricity supplied, property protected, skills taught, contracts enforced, and corruption reduced. The ministry announces a youth entrepreneurship program. Thousands apply. Fifty receive training on how to write business plans. Ten receive loans. One is the minister’s nephew, whose business plan contains the advanced concept “import things.” The remaining applicants receive certificates. The certificates are excellent for decorating the room where they continue to live with their parents.

Employment Is Not a Rally

Jobs emerge from productive firms, farms, services, infrastructure, trade, stable rules, investment, technology, and competent public institutions. Government can help, but it cannot clap an economy into existence.

Young people are often praised as the future because praising the future is cheaper than hiring the present.

A nation should not call its youth an engine while refusing to provide fuel, road, mechanic, or destination.

Good leaders publish honest employment data, remove barriers to enterprise, invest in skills linked to real demand, support research and industry, make credit accessible, and

stop treating every successful businessperson as either a donor or a suspect.

Young Ethiopian, do not become cynical. Build skill. Create value. Organize. Demand policy that works. But never let a slogan persuade you that the absence of results is your failure to believe.

REMEMBER *A job is a better youth policy than a poster about youth.*

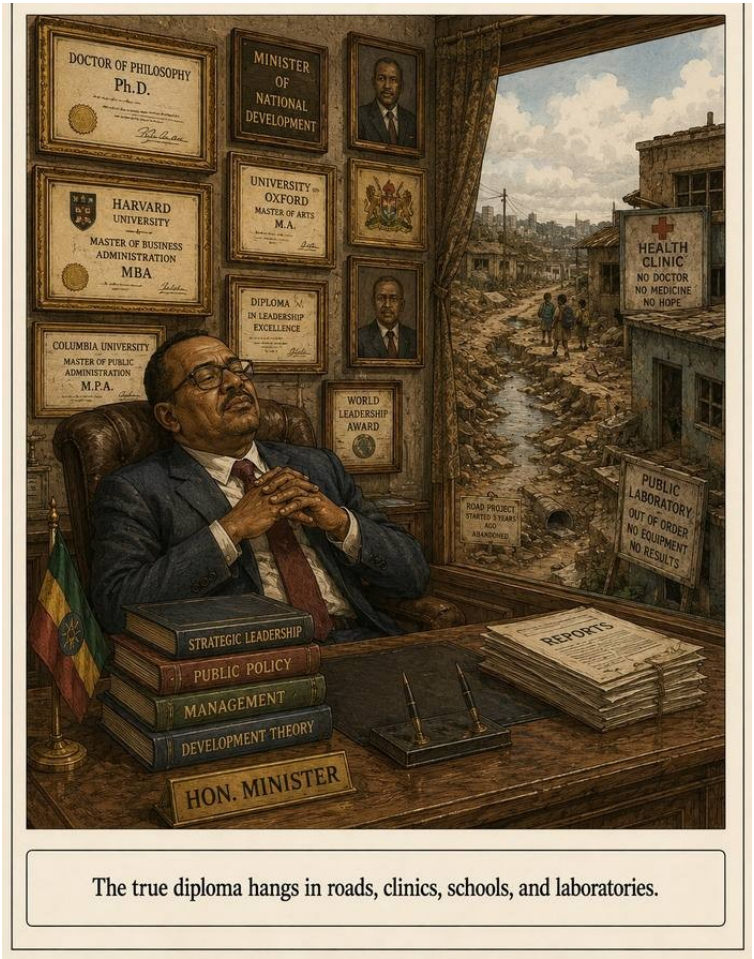
LETTER PAUSE

The final chapter in this part enters the minister's office and examines his real diploma: the country outside the window.

CHAPTER 15

The Real Diploma Is Outside the Office

A leader may have excellent degrees and still produce terrible results



The minister’s office wall was academically crowded. There was a bachelor’s degree, a master’s degree, a Ph.D., an

executive certificate, an honorary doctorate, a leadership fellowship, and a photograph of the minister receiving another certificate for attending a conference about certificates. Outside the office, the road was broken, the clinic was short of medicine, the university laboratory was waiting for equipment, and the electricity had again entered a reflective period.

The wall said “qualified.” The country asked, “For what?”

Education and Statecraft

Education matters. Ethiopia needs trained leaders, scientists, engineers, economists, lawyers, doctors, teachers, and administrators. The answer is not less education. The answer is to stop confusing credentials with wisdom, character, judgment, and results.

A person can study democracy and hate disagreement. He can study economics and destroy confidence. She can study law and weaken courts. He can write a dissertation on decentralization and refuse to delegate the office key.

The educated leader may be more dangerous than the ignorant one if education gives arrogance a vocabulary.

The Country Is the Examination

Ask what the leadership produced. Is the country more peaceful? Are institutions stronger? Can citizens criticize without becoming security topics? Are businesses growing? Are schools teaching? Are young people staying? Can a leader lose and leave?

These are harder questions than university examinations because the answers cannot be memorized the night before.

A leader’s true degree is written in the life of the people.

Education should make a person humble because knowledge reveals complexity. It should teach evidence, revision, uncertainty, and respect for expertise. If a Ph.D.

teaches only how to insult opponents using longer words, the degree has become expensive decoration.

Young Ethiopian, become educated. Become excellent. Then let your work prove the certificate.

We have now laughed at convoys, committees, speeches, portraits, relatives, emergencies, apps, slogans, and degrees. The jokes point toward a deeper question: what makes a person need power so badly that every institution must become furniture around him?

That is where the next part begins.

REMEMBER *Do not count the degrees on the leader's wall. Count the functioning systems outside his office.*

LETTER PAUSE

We now meet the hunger for power — the private wound that sometimes receives a public budget.

INTERLUDE

A Job Advertisement

Clipped from the classifieds section of the national newspaper, between the weather and more weather.

VACANCY: MINISTER OF ANNOUNCEMENTS (Deputy, Acting, Permanent)

The Republic seeks an energetic individual to launch, re-launch, revitalize, inaugurate, and, where necessary, re-inaugurate national programs. The successful candidate will explain, in a warm and confident voice, why implementation begins next year.

Essential qualifications: the ability to describe a foundation stone as a completed hospital; fluency in the future tense; a face suitable for banners; and at least five years' experience opening doors that were already open.

Desirable: previous employment as Minister of Rain, or comparable success in taking credit for weather.

Duties include: cutting ribbons; standing near ribbons; commissioning ribbons; and delivering the keynote address at the Annual Conference on the Delivery of Keynote Addresses.

Salary: undisclosed, but visible from the road.

Applicants who have ever measured a result will be considered overqualified. Please do not attach a CV — attach a slogan.

Applications close Tomorrow. See Memorandum No. 4,117.

Questions for Your Generation

Three questions to argue about before the next part.

1. If a hospital exists only in a speech, who pays for it? List three people who paid.

2. Why is a portrait cheaper than a road — and why does it sometimes get built first?

3. Design a rule that would make a leader’s convoy smaller. Who would resist it, and why?

PART III

POWER, CHAIRS, AND LADDERS

The chair, the ladder, the hyena, and the microphone: what a person needs from power tells you how he will use it.

CHAPTER 16

The Hunger for Power

When public office becomes private therapy

Not everyone who wants to lead wants power for the same reason. Some people seek authority because they genuinely want to serve. Others seek it because power gives them something they do not feel they possess inside themselves.

A person who feels small may want a position that makes other people bow. A person who feels ignored may want a title that forces everyone to notice him. The office becomes compensation. The title becomes medicine. The chair becomes proof: “Now I am somebody.” Unfortunately, the taxpayers pay for the therapy. It happens in the highest palace and the smallest office. Yesterday a man stood in line with everyone else. Today he has a stamp, a secretary, and a door that stays closed even when he is inside. By next week he expects citizens to approach at a forty-five-degree angle. The position did not create his insecurity. It gave his insecurity a weapon.

A secure person can tolerate disagreement. An insecure person experiences disagreement as disrespect. A secure leader appoints intelligent people; an insecure leader appoints people who laugh before the joke is finished. A secure leader can say, “I was wrong”; an insecure leader forms a committee to prove that reality was wrong. A secure leader can leave office; an insecure leader believes that without the office he will shrink back into the person he fears he is.

Insecurity is not a crime; every human being carries some. The danger begins when a private wound receives public authority. So we do not diagnose politicians from a distance. We design systems for ordinary human weakness. A healthy institution assumes that leaders can become defensive, tired, misinformed, surrounded by flatterers, or tempted by permanence — which is why power is divided, finances audited, terms limited, courts independent, and journalists able to ask rude questions without disappearing. Constitutional design is humility organized into law.

Pay attention to small signs. The leader who needs constant praise may later punish honest advice. The official who treats service workers badly may treat citizens badly when cameras are absent. Power reveals habits that ordinary life could hide. And we help: we place leaders above accountability, call them fathers of adults, treat criticism as

insult to the nation, and explain every achievement as a personal gift. The leader begins to believe the advertisement. Citizens give exaggerated praise in return for access; the leader gives symbolic attention in return for loyalty; institutions weaken because relationships matter more than rules.

How do we produce such leaders?

Partly through family and education, by teaching children that worth does not depend on domination. Partly through economic security, because desperation makes office a rare route to dignity. Mostly through institutions, because no society should gamble its future on finding perfectly healed personalities. And partly by changing what we admire: the loud commanding figure receives attention, while the quiet administrator who makes a service reliable may be worth more. The leader who leaves on time is mocked as weak, though leaving is one of the strongest acts in politics.

Young Ethiopian, do not seek leadership as proof that you matter. Matter first. Build skill, character, relationships, and a life that survives the title.

Your Leaders Are Not Greater Than You

Do not assume that because somebody became a minister, chairman, general, or prime minister, the office has made him wiser than the people he governs. Power does not increase intelligence. A motorcade can make traffic stop; it cannot make an argument correct.

Some of you already understand technologies, global systems, and scientific tools that some leaders barely recognize. Why, then, should your politics remain trapped inside hatreds created before you were born? Respect your elders. Learn from their experience. But do not inherit their errors as sacred property. Your generation should be ahead of ours. It must be.

The Strange Political Movie We Keep Watching

A new government arrives. People celebrate. Political prisoners are released. The doors open. The leaders announce, 'The age of repression is over.'

Wonderful.

Then years pass. Criticism grows. Journalists become troublesome. Activists become dangerous. Opponents return to the same prison that was proudly emptied.

What changed?

If you open a prison when you are weak and fill it when you become strong, perhaps you did not oppose political imprisonment. Perhaps you opposed who was doing the imprisoning.

Do not judge politicians only by their first speeches. Anybody can sound democratic while trying to obtain power. The real examination begins after obtaining it.

Practice Addition

Sometimes I wonder whether our politics needs a return to elementary mathematics. Leaders speak constantly about addition: unity, prosperity, peace, one Ethiopia. Then they practice subtraction: remove this group, exclude that region, dismiss those professors, silence those critics, destroy what the previous government built.

Ten plus ten equals twenty.

Ten minus three minus two minus four equals one. You cannot repeatedly subtract people from a country and then give a speech about national unity.

Ethnic identities deserve respect. The danger begins when politics teaches a citizen to ask which group acted before asking whether the act was right. If my group does it, I explain. If your group does it, I condemn. If my group suffers, the world must hear; if another group suffers, suddenly I require more information. That is not justice.

Justice must work even when the victim is someone you dislike.

Practice addition. Add Oromo, Amhara, Tigrayan, Somali, Afar, Sidama, Gurage, and every other Ethiopian community. Add Christians, Muslims, believers, and nonbelievers. Add farmers, professors, workers, businesspeople, people inside Ethiopia, and the diaspora.

Especially add people who disagree with you.

A country in which only government supporters are welcome is not a united country. It is a political meeting, and Ethiopia must be larger than any political meeting.

A great leader asks, “How do I bring more Ethiopians into the national project?” A weak leader asks, “Whom must I remove to remain comfortable?”

The next chapter gives this insecurity a comic object: the chairman’s very big chair.

REMEMBER *A private insecurity becomes a public danger when authority gives it a weapon.*

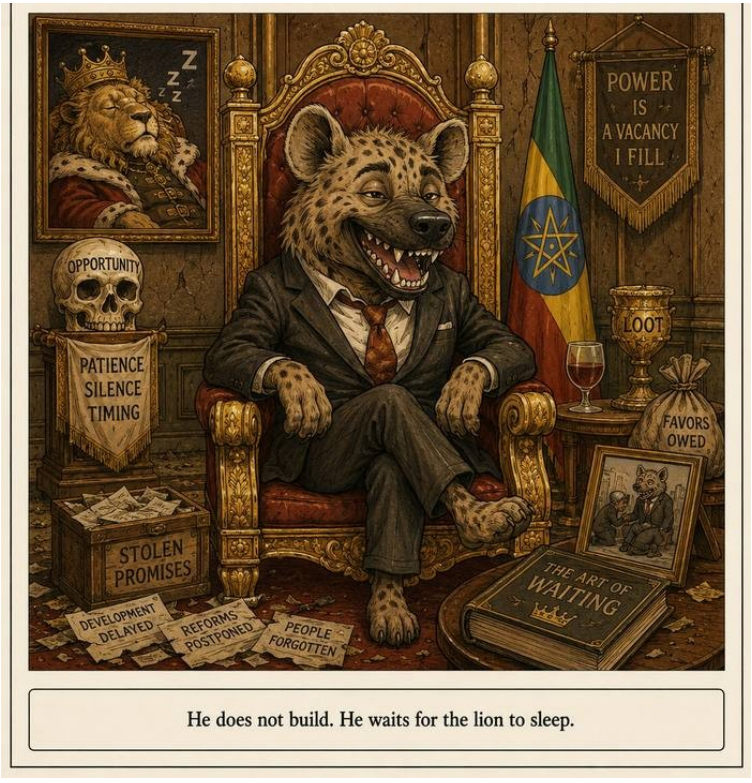
LETTER PAUSE

Public office should not become therapy paid for by citizens.

CHAPTER 17

The Hyena in the Palace

Always laughing. Always waiting.



Young Ethiopian, you already know the hyena that eats a man’s leg while he begs the room to be quiet. Allow me to introduce his cousin. This one does not hide in the dark. He has an office.

The Hyena in the Palace arrived years ago as a modest adviser. He laughed at every joke the leader made. He laughed before the joke was finished. He laughed at jokes that had not yet been told, in case they were coming. Laughter, he discovered, is the cheapest currency in a palace and the most reliably accepted.

He agreed with everything. When the leader said the harvest was excellent, the hyena said the harvest was historic. When the leader changed his mind the next morning, the hyena had already changed his the previous night, out of loyalty. He was never wrong, because he never held an opinion long enough for reality to test it.

Slowly he acquired things. A title. A larger title. A car with a flag on it. A second flag, in case the first one felt lonely. His teeth remained hidden most of the time. He was, everyone agreed, delightful company — always laughing, always available, always in the photograph, always just to the left of the person who mattered.

The Patience of Predators

Here is the difference between the hyena in the house and the hyena in the palace. The first one bites immediately. The second one waits. He knows the palace better than the leader does. He knows which door the auditor uses, which journalist has a sick mother, which general is unhappy about his pension, which cousin controls the fuel contract, and which file, if it disappeared, would disappear quietly.

He does not attack the leader. He feeds on the space around him. A ministry here. A procurement there. A promotion for a nephew who cannot read the job description but has an excellent smile. When honest people leave, he expresses deep regret and recommends a replacement. The replacement laughs at the correct moments too.

The leader, meanwhile, believes he has a friend. This is the hyena’s finest work. A ruler surrounded by frightened people knows he is surrounded by frightened people. A ruler surrounded by laughing people believes he is loved. The hyena is not the danger the leader fears. He is the danger the leader enjoys.

The Day the Music Changes

Every palace hyena has one skill above all others: he can hear the music change before the band knows it. When the

leader's health, popularity, or foreign friends begin to weaken, the hyena's laughter becomes slightly quieter, slightly later, slightly less certain. Then one morning he is photographed just to the left of a different person. He is still laughing. The teeth are still hidden. He has simply moved his chair, and the new leader is delighted to have found such an experienced, agreeable, well-connected friend.

The palace hyena has served four governments and never once been in opposition. He calls this stability. The country calls it something else, but quietly.

How to Recognize Him

You will not find him by looking for cruelty. Look for agreement. In a healthy institution, an adviser who says "no" to a leader is doing his job. In a palace with a hyena, "no" has been reclassified as disloyalty, and the only person still using the word is the auditor, who is about to be transferred to a region with poor road access.

Look for laughter with no information in it. Look for the person who was close to power under three flags. Look for the man who is deeply moved by every speech and has never once asked what it will cost. Look, above all, for the space that empties around him — the honest deputy who resigned, the professor who left, the journalist who stopped calling.

Institutions defeat the palace hyena the way a strong door defeats the house hyena: not by shouting, but by construction. Published budgets take away his darkness. Independent audits take away his files. Competitive appointments take away his nephews. Term limits take away his most valuable possession — time. A leader who leaves on schedule leaves the hyena without a chair to move to.

The hyena in the house eats a leg. The hyena in the palace eats a country, one agreeable lunch at a time. He is always laughing. He is always waiting. And the most dangerous

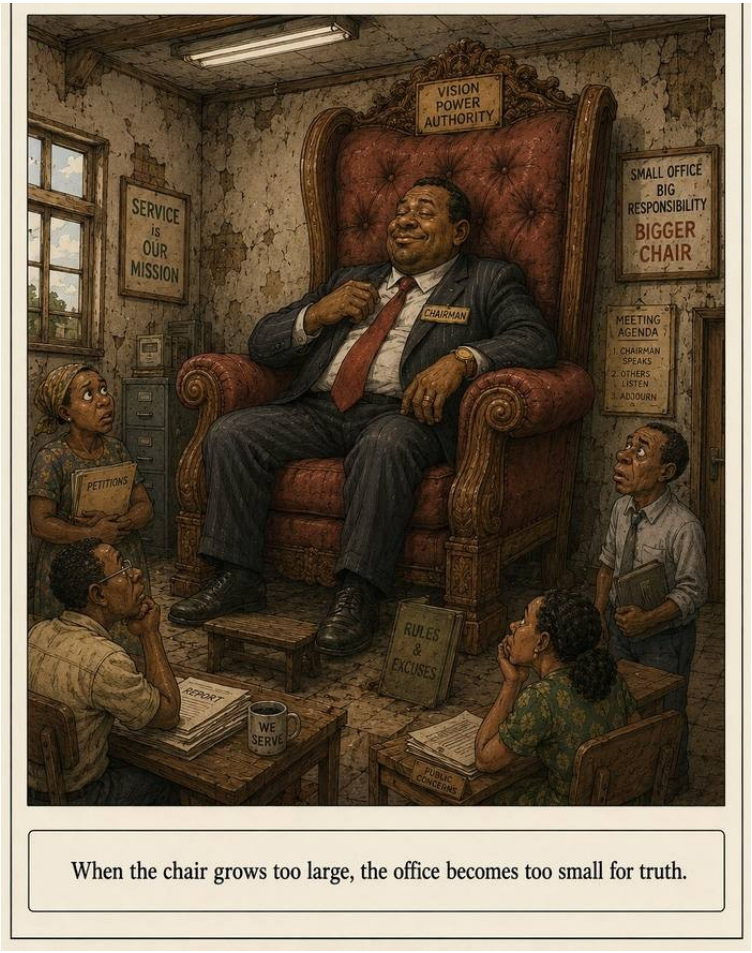
sentence in any government is the one the leader says about him: “At least I know he is on my side.”

REMEMBER *The hyena in the house bites in the dark. The hyena in the palace laughs in the light — and waits.*

CHAPTER 18

The Chairman’s Very Big Chair

A small office discovers the technology of thunder



Let us visit a fictional kebele office.

Yesterday, the chairman was an ordinary man. He greeted neighbors, waited for coffee, and borrowed a pen. Then he received an appointment letter.

By morning, the chair had grown.

Not the chairman. The chair.

It sits behind a desk so large that citizens must speak across a small agricultural zone. Behind it hangs a portrait of a more important leader. On the desk sits a stamp. The stamp is red, round, and spiritually powerful.

A citizen enters carrying a simple request. Perhaps he needs a letter confirming where he lives. The chairman studies the paper as though deciding whether to admit a new country to the United Nations.

“Come tomorrow,” he says.

The citizen came yesterday.

“Tomorrow has been rescheduled,” says the secretary. The chairman is not necessarily corrupt. Sometimes he is enjoying something even more intoxicating: delay. The ability to make another human being wait can feel like proof of importance. He has discovered thunder.

The office may be small, but power does not measure square meters. A minor official can make a poor person’s life impossible by withholding one stamp. The rules are unclear; the official knows the citizen needs him more than he needs the citizen. This is how petty authority becomes grand cruelty.

The solution is not to search for a naturally angelic chairman. Angels rarely apply for local administration posts, and their paperwork is uncertain.

The solution is a system: clear requirements, published fees, deadlines, receipts, appeal procedures, digital records where possible, supervision, and consequences for abuse. A citizen should not need personal friendship, a relative, a gift, or an advanced degree in waiting.

Public service means the office belongs to the public. The chair is not a throne. The stamp is not a family heirloom. The citizen is not asking for mercy when requesting a lawful service. Young Ethiopian, remember this when you enter an office — and remember it harder if you become the person

behind the desk. The true size of a public servant is measured by how little unnecessary humiliation occurs in the room.

The chair is funny because everyone recognizes it. The furniture is ordinary; the behavior makes it enormous. Before the appointment, the man stood in line. After it, the line became evidence of disrespect. Before, he answered his own telephone. After, an assistant answered in a tone suggesting the caller had interrupted national security.

This is not about every local official. Many kebele workers serve under low pay, public anger, unclear rules, and political pressure, and help citizens patiently. The target is the person who converts a modest public duty into a private kingdom.

Local government is where citizens meet the state. Most people never meet a president. They meet the clerk, the police officer, the nurse, the permit officer, the chairman. That encounter becomes the citizen’s definition of government. A constitution may promise equality; if the clerk requires a connection, equality remains a paragraph. If the office is closed during working hours because everybody is attending an unexplained meeting, the citizen receives the real law.

This is why administrative dignity matters. Posted requirements, receipts, time limits, complaint procedures, and respectful treatment can change a country’s political culture without a single grand speech. Corruption begins in small exchanges: a citizen offers a favor because the process is uncertain; the official accepts because salary is low or impunity is normal; soon the unofficial payment becomes the real fee, and honest people look naive.

Reform must address ethics and systems together: simplify procedures, pay workers fairly, rotate sensitive roles, audit decisions, protect whistleblowers, and punish abuse through law rather than public theater. Most importantly, stop treating the official as the owner of the service. Imagine if every office displayed not the leader’s portrait

but one sentence: “The citizen standing here is not asking for your favor. He is requesting a lawful service.” That sentence would make some chairs feel noticeably smaller.

REMEMBER *The chair belongs to the public. The person sitting in it is temporary.*

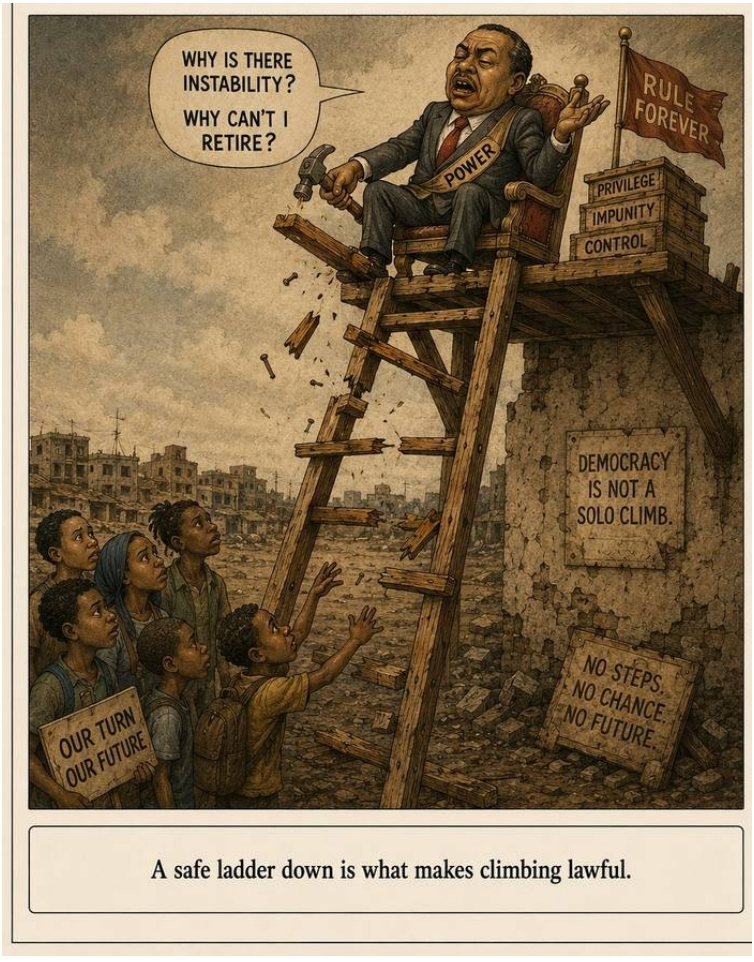
LETTER PAUSE

Make the chair smaller by making the rule clearer.

CHAPTER 19

The Ladder Repair Department

How a leader climbs up, removes the steps, and then complains that he cannot retire



You met the ladder in the Introduction. Here is what keeps it standing. Safe retirement is a democratic institution. A leader who knows he can leave office, keep his dignity and lawful property, receive security, publish memoirs nobody

finishes, and disagree with the next government has less reason to convert the state into personal armor. A peaceful transfer is not kindness toward a former ruler. It is protection for the public.

The opposition also has responsibility. If every change of government is expected to begin with collective punishment, the current leader will fight change as though it were death. Accountability for crimes matters. Revenge against everyone associated with a previous administration is different. Justice must be individual, lawful, evidenced, and bounded. Otherwise every government learns the same lesson: never lose.

Young Ethiopian, do not ask only whether you like the person climbing. Ask whether the steps remain available to the person you dislike. That is the real test of institutions.

Supporters help remove the ladder. Criticism will weaken the leader, they say. This election is too important for uncertainty. The restriction is temporary. The court must understand the historical moment. Each step is removed for a good reason, one good reason at a time. Authoritarianism rarely announces, “Today we begin authoritarianism.” It announces an emergency, a reform, a security measure, a national renewal. Then temporary learns to sit comfortably.

A functioning political system needs two honorable ceremonies: entering office and leaving it.

We have mastered the first: crowds, flags, prayers, uniforms, microphones. The second is more important and usually quieter. A leader shakes hands, transfers documents, walks out, and discovers that the sun still rises without permission. And the ladder is not only for presidents. A founder who cannot train a successor is removing it. A professor who blocks younger scholars is removing it. A party leader who postpones internal elections is removing it. A diaspora association whose chairman has served since the fax-machine era has misplaced several steps.

Leadership is not proved by reaching the top. It is proved by leaving a safe path for the next person.

It is proved by leaving a safe path for the next person. REMEMBER: The strongest political system is not the one with the best climber.

It is the one that keeps the ladder standing in both directions.

LETTER PAUSE

The strongest political system is not the one with the best climber. It is the one that keeps the ladder standing in both directions.

Which rung of peaceful political change is weakest: courts, media, elections, opposition, civil society, or safe retirement?

CHAPTER 20

The King’s Bed

The problem may not only be the son; it may also be the bed

Once there was a kingdom with a famous royal bed. Every new king arrived promising humility. Before sleeping, he told the people, “I am only your servant. I will listen. I will remain simple.”

Then he lay down.

The mattress whispered, “You are the nation.”

By breakfast, the king required eight guards, three advisers, a special spoon, and a committee to determine the correct distance from which citizens should applaud.

The people blamed the king.

Eventually they replaced him with his son, who had spent years criticizing the father. The son entered the palace wearing ordinary shoes and carrying a reform program.

Then he slept in the bed.

The mattress whispered, “Only you understand the country.”

By lunch, the son had banned two newspapers and asked why the national flag did not include his profile.

The people blamed the son.

Another leader came. Same promise. Same bed. Same breakfast. Perhaps the problem was not only the sleepers.

Perhaps it was also the bed.

The royal bed is unchecked power: weak courts, frightened civil servants, controlled media, personal security forces, unlimited terms, secret budgets, and a political culture that treats the leader as father, prophet, general, and weather forecast. Put an imperfect human being in that bed and then act surprised when he begins dreaming nationally.

This is why our future should not depend on finding a perfect person. Even good leaders become isolated when everyone around them is rewarded for agreement. A constitution, independent courts, a free press, term limits, transparent budgets, and genuine competition exist because power changes people. They are not insults to a leader. They are seat belts — for the nation and for the leader himself.

Do not spend your life searching for a saint who can safely sleep in the royal bed.

Change the bed.

Make it an ordinary public cot with an alarm clock, a checkout date, and no whispering mattress.

We tell political history as a search for the right individual: the good king, the wise revolutionary, the visionary prime minister, the incorruptible president. Each generation introduces a new person as though human nature has issued an improved model. Then the person enters the same arrangement — concentrated authority, weak review, rewards for loyalty, punishment for defeat, no safe exit — and the bed changes the sleeper. Information narrows. The ruler begins to identify personal survival with national survival.

So institutional questions matter more than personality questions. Who can review the decision? Who controls the money? Who appoints judges? Can journalists investigate? Can parliament refuse? What happens when the leader loses?

A beautiful constitution is not enough. Institutions require professional people, public expectations, enforcement, and time. A court is independent only if judges can decide against power and remain judges. An election is meaningful only if the loser can organize again. A civil service is professional only if competence survives a change of government.

Do not confuse skepticism about heroic leadership with cynicism. Leadership matters; a bad leader can damage in months what took decades to build. But the best leader uses power to reduce the country’s dependence on the next leader. That is the test. Does the institution become stronger than the personality? Are successors prepared? Can the leader leave? A ruler who claims that only he can protect the country is announcing an institutional failure, even if the claim is temporarily true.

The bed must therefore be redesigned. It should be uncomfortable for abuse, impossible to own permanently,

and easy to leave without falling into prison or revenge. It should distribute weight through law.

This may sound less exciting than finding a national savior. Good. Excitement is an unreliable constitutional principle. Our next story shows the same disease before anyone even reaches government: a rebel group cannot choose a leader because one member insists that leadership belongs to him.

REMEMBER *Do not search only for the perfect sleeper. Build a bed that limits imperfect human beings.*

LETTER PAUSE

A constitution is a design for imperfect human beings, not a certificate that perfect leaders have finally arrived.

CHAPTER 21

They Could Not Even Choose a Leader

Democracy fails early when one person says, 'Either I lead, or there is no agreement'

There is a political lesson hidden inside a very small meeting. Imagine a rebel movement formed to fight a government. The members agree that the government is

unjust. They agree that change is necessary. They agree that people have suffered. They agree that they must organize. They even agree that the organization needs one leader.

Then comes the moment to choose the leader.

Suddenly unity develops a medical complication.

One man says: “I must be the leader.”

The others say, “We should discuss it. We should vote. We should select the person the group trusts.”

The man replies, “Excellent democratic ideas. I will implement them immediately after you select me.”

He may have spoken for years about justice. He may condemn the ruler for refusing to share power. But inside a small room with ten colleagues, he cannot accept the possibility that another person will be chosen. How can a movement promise democracy to millions if it cannot practice democracy among ten people? This is where we discover that the disease can survive the revolution before the revolution has begun.

The group may call itself liberation, democratic, federalist, nationalist, reformist, popular, people’s, front, congress, council, movement, or provisional coordinating committee for the eventual establishment of a permanent transitional arrangement. The label does not cure the ego.

If one member says, “Either I lead or there will be no agreement,” the old political culture is already sitting in the new organization. The government they oppose may not yet have fallen, but the next struggle for power has started.

The person demanding leadership may sincerely believe he is the best candidate. Perhaps he is educated. Perhaps he is brave. Perhaps he sacrificed more. Perhaps he founded the movement. Perhaps he owns the only functioning printer.

None of these automatically gives him permanent ownership. Democracy begins at the exact moment when a

person can say: “I believe I should lead. I will make my case. But if the group chooses someone else, I will accept the decision and continue serving.”

That sentence is much harder than “I believe in democracy.”

Anyone can say the second. The first requires character. Young Ethiopian, look closely at the internal life of every organization asking for your loyalty. Do not judge it only by what it says about the government. Ask: How does it choose leaders?

Can members criticize them?

Are finances transparent?

Do women and younger members have real influence? Can a founder be replaced?

Does disagreement lead to debate, expulsion, or a new faction with almost the same name?

Can the group lose an internal vote without declaring the vote illegal?

Organizations reveal their future in miniature. A movement that humiliates dissenters in opposition will not protect dissenters in government. A leader who cannot share a rented office is not preparing to share a country. A committee that needs three breakaway committees to choose one chairperson is demonstrating advanced national readiness.

This is not an argument against opposition or resistance under every circumstance. It is an argument that suffering does not automatically produce democratic virtue. Being oppressed does not teach a person how not to oppress. Fighting a dictator does not make someone democratic. A legitimate grievance gives a claim to justice. It does not give permanent ownership of the state.

The real test comes before victory. Can its leader hear no? Can a commander submit to civilian rules? Can the

organization imagine becoming an ordinary party rather than a permanent historical vanguard? If five people cannot peacefully decide which one will lead, how will they govern one hundred million?

This is why Ethiopia needs not only new leaders but a new relationship with losing.

Losing a vote should not mean losing dignity, citizenship, property, safety, or the right to try again. Until that becomes normal, every contest will feel like war.

And every movement will carry a small king inside its revolutionary bag.

REMEMBER *Democracy begins the first time your own group chooses someone other than you — and you accept it.*

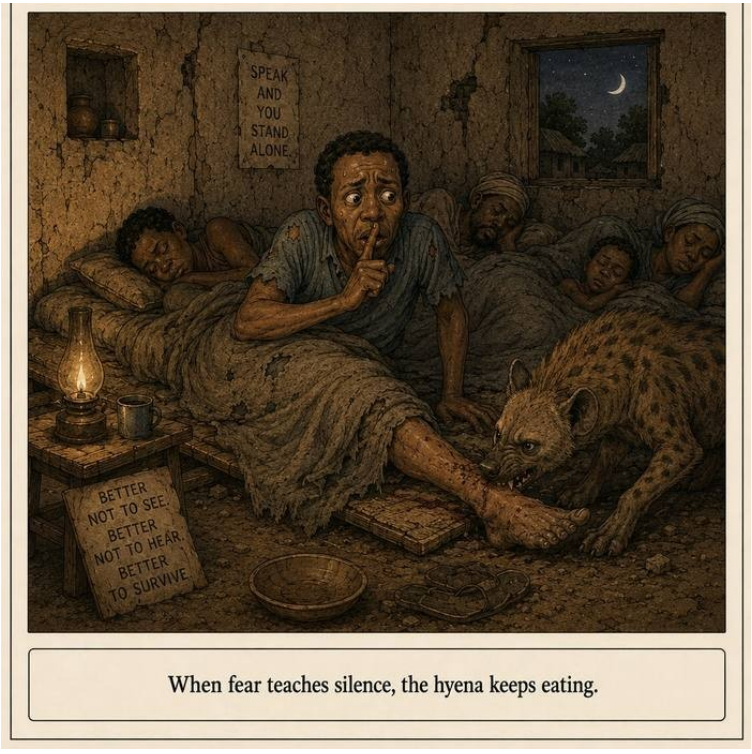
LETTER PAUSE

Democracy begins before victory: it begins when your own group chooses someone else and you accept it.

CHAPTER 22

The Hyena Is Eating My Leg

Fear becomes complete when the victim protects the silence


SPEAK AND YOU STAND ALONE.
BETTER NOT TO SEE. BETTER NOT TO HEAR. BETTER TO SURVIVE.
When fear teaches silence, the hyena keeps eating.

A group of people gathered for a celebration. They ate, talked, laughed, and eventually slept inside a simple mud house with a weak door.

During the night, a hyena entered.

The hyena had not been invited, but it behaved like a senior official.

It found one man and began eating his leg.

The man woke in terrible pain. Someone nearby heard movement and began to speak.

The injured man whispered, “Shhh. Do not talk. The hyena is eating my leg.”

Think about that sentence.

The hyena was eating his leg, yet he was the one asking everyone else to remain silent.

Why?

Fear.

He feared that if the others shouted, moved, or resisted, the hyena might become more violent. So he accepted the immediate pain to avoid an imagined greater danger.

This is how fear can enter a society. A person is harmed, but he says, “Do not make trouble.” A family loses something, but relatives warn, “Keep quiet.” An official abuses power, but neighbors say, “At least he did not do worse.”

The victim begins defending the silence that permits the harm. The lesson is not reckless resistance; courage without judgment gets innocent people hurt. But if every person survives by ignoring what happens to someone else, eventually everyone sleeps alone beside the same weak door. The hyena learns that the house is quiet.

When injustice targets a stranger, we tell ourselves it is not our leg. When it reaches our neighbor, we lower our voices. When it reaches us, we discover that nobody remembers how to shout together. Fear is most powerful when it becomes a habit rather than an emergency.

“Do not complain. They may do worse.” “Do not report it. You will bring trouble to the family.” “Do not criticize the official. We still need his signature.” Fear does not always command silence directly. It teaches people to command one another — and that enforcement is more efficient than police, because the state does not need to be present in every room if citizens carry the warning inside themselves.

The lesson is not that every frightened person is a coward. Fear can be rational: speaking may endanger a job, a family, liberty, or life, and people who live safely abroad should be careful about demanding heroism from those who will face the consequences. Courage must be organized. Independent courts, professional associations, unions, journalists, legal aid, and collective action make truth safer. When institutions protect speech, bravery becomes less expensive.

Solidarity is practical, not only emotional. It means documenting what happened, accompanying the vulnerable person, sharing legal costs, refusing collective punishment, and continuing after the news cycle moves on.

The house matters too. Everyone sleeps together behind one weak door, yet each sleeper calculates that silence protects him for one more night. Authoritarian systems survive on this arithmetic: first a small group is targeted; others stay quiet because they are not members; then the definition of the target expands; by the time everyone understands, collective trust is gone. How do we rebuild it? Defend due process for people you dislike. Reject rumors that flatter your side. Do not celebrate an abusive method because it is used against an opponent — the weapon will be inherited by someone else.

There is also a personal version. A family, office, church, or association may protect a powerful abuser because exposing him would disturb the institution’s reputation. The victim is asked to preserve unity. But unity purchased with the victim’s silence is only organized fear.

No society can eliminate danger. The goal is to build conditions in which a person does not have to choose between suffering quietly and making the danger worse. From the dark room of the hyena, the letter now returns to comedy: some leaders do not silence the public; they simply occupy so much of the microphone that no public remains audible.

LETTER PAUSE

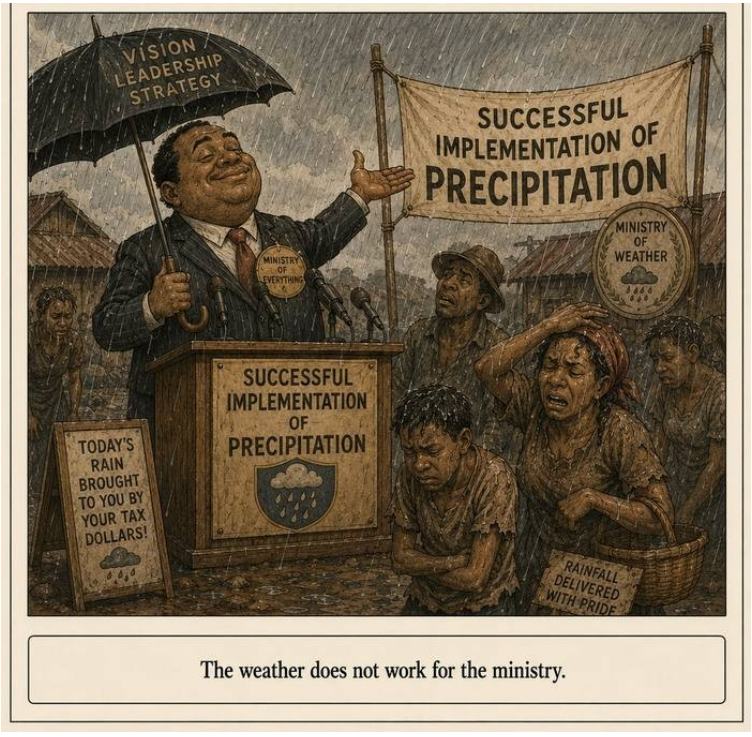
When the victim protects the silence, fear has entered deeper than the hyena's teeth.

Courage is not shouting from safety. It is helping create protection so that the vulnerable person does not stand alone.

CHAPTER 23

The Minister Who Announced the Rain

When public officials take credit for weather, breathing may soon require a permit



One afternoon, clouds gathered over the capital.

Rain began to fall.

A government communications office moved quickly. Within the hour, a statement thanked the minister for his strategic leadership in the successful implementation of precipitation. Television showed the minister looking thoughtfully at the sky. A panelist explained that previous governments had produced only uncoordinated rain.

Citizens were encouraged to remain grateful and, where possible, dry.

This is satire. It is also a recognizable political habit: leaders take personal credit for every good event and assign every bad event to enemies, weather, history, inherited conditions, or an unidentified technical issue currently under investigation.

A harvest improves because of wise leadership.

The harvest fails because of climate.

Electricity arrives because the minister cares.

Electricity disappears because citizens use too much electricity at the same time.

A road opens because of vision.

The road breaks because of unusually road-like conditions. This turns government into a theater of gifts: services appear as favors from generous officials rather than obligations financed by citizens. A government should receive credit for real performance — cynicism that refuses to acknowledge improvement is another form of dishonesty — but credit must be proportional, evidenced, and institutional. No president personally poured every kilometer of asphalt. No party produced the river. The leader is part of the story, not the creator of weather.

Why does exaggerated credit matter? Because it changes citizenship into gratitude. A grateful subject receives. A citizen has rights. If the clinic is the leader’s gift, criticizing the clinic becomes ingratitude. If electricity is a personal blessing, demanding reliable service sounds disrespectful. This is how public property becomes political property. And the reverse is dangerous too: the leader who claims every success becomes the national electrician, meteorologist, economist, football coach, and examiner of grade-ten results. The cult of competence eventually produces a festival of disappointment.

Strong institutions distribute both credit and responsibility: a ministry publishes targets, an auditor checks spending, a local government answers for local service, and citizens can compare performance over time. The leader does not need to appear in every photograph because the system itself is visible. This is less dramatic. It is also more useful. Some countries make reliability boring: water arrives, trash is collected, the train runs, and nobody organizes a rally to thank the director of doors for allowing the building to open. Ethiopia needs more boring success.

When rain falls, thank God if you believe, study the climate if you are a scientist, maintain drainage if you are an engineer, protect the watershed if you are a government, and carry an umbrella if you are sensible.

Do not print the minister’s face on the cloud.

REMEMBER *Public services are not gifts from officials. They are obligations carried out with public authority and public resources.*

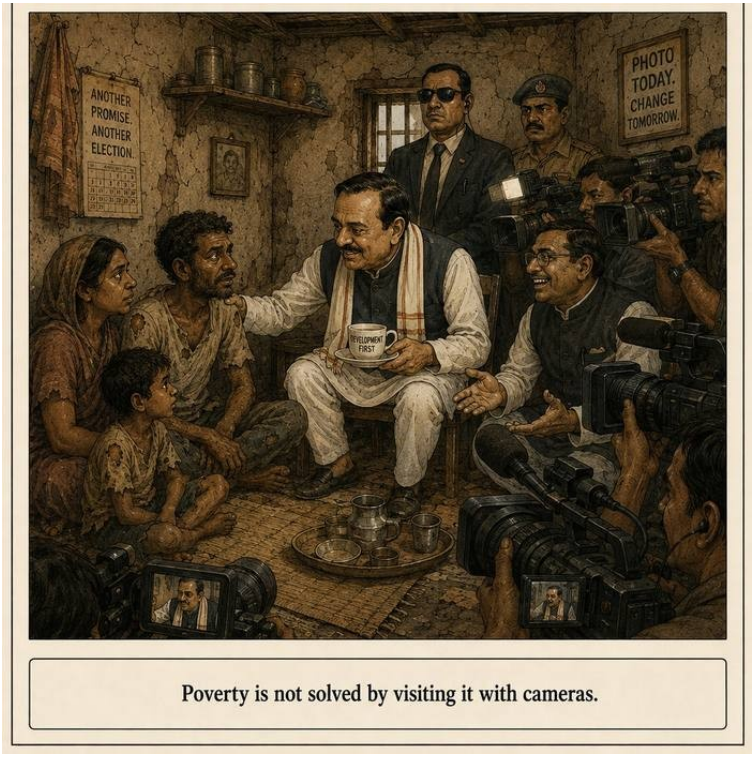
LETTER PAUSE

Rain does not require a ministry of congratulations. Learn to distinguish public service from ownership of nature.

CHAPTER 24

The Leader Who Entered the Poor Man’s House

He arrived with cameras and left with the coffee cup


ANOTHER PROMISE. ANOTHER ELECTION.
PHOTO TODAY. CHANGE TOMORROW.
DEVELOPMENT FIRST
Poverty is not solved by visiting it with cameras.

There is a kind of political image people never forget. A powerful leader enters a poor neighborhood. He steps into a small house. Behind him come two camera operators, three security officers, one minister, one microphone, and a man whose only visible responsibility is to look concerned.

The house has never held so many important people or so little listening.

The leader sits with the family. Perhaps he drinks coffee. Perhaps he asks about the children. The photographs spread everywhere.

“Look,” people say. “He is close to the poor.”

Perhaps the gesture is sincere. Perhaps roads are built and services improve. Public leaders should visit ordinary homes. They should see how people live.

But a visit is not a right.

Years later, the same government begins changing the city. New roads. New buildings. New development. Suddenly houses where ordinary families have lived for years are called illegal. Bulldozers arrive. Walls fall. Families leave.

Yesterday the leader entered the poor man’s house to show that he cared. Today the state destroys the same kind of house because development wants the land.

Cities need planning. But the word illegal does not erase a human life. To the government, it is an illegal structure. To the family, it was home — twenty years built room by room, children raised, a shop that was the only income. The bulldozer destroys the wall in ten minutes. It cannot measure the twenty years inside it.

Do not judge a leader by how comfortably he enters a poor person’s house when the camera is present. Judge him by whether the poor person still has rights when the government wants the land. A visit is a gesture. A system that protects the poor when they stand against the government is an institution.

The cameras change the direction of attention: the leader appears to be looking at the family, but the image is designed for the nation looking at the leader. Visits can be valuable; the problem begins when observation becomes performance and performance replaces policy. A poor family receives coffee, questions, and twenty important shoes inside one small room. After the convoy leaves, the roof still leaks.

Learn to distinguish symbolic politics from institutional change. A symbol becomes manipulation when it asks the photograph to do work that the budget, law, and administration have not done. The questions after the visit are simple: Was the problem recorded? Was an office assigned? Was there a deadline? Did the solution apply to similar families, or only to the one whose house became famous? Did the leader return without cameras?

A just state cannot depend on being noticed by a powerful person. Rights travel farther than sympathy because they do not require personal attention from the top. The next chapter stays with the same family when the official vocabulary changes: the house is no longer called home. It is called illegal.

REMEMBER *The real photograph of compassion is not the visit. It is the right that remains after the cameras leave.*

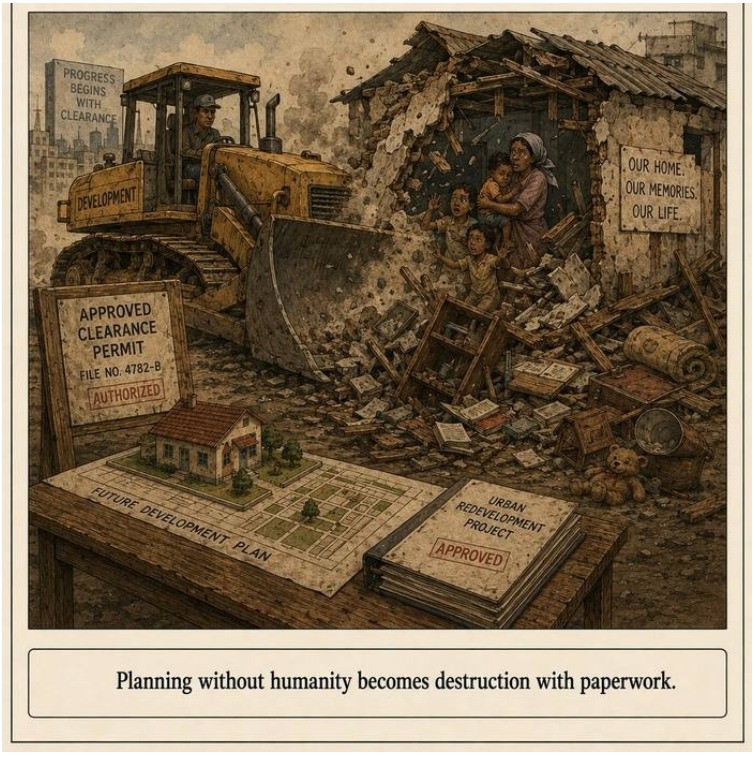
LETTER PAUSE

A visit can create a photograph. A right creates protection after the convoy leaves.

CHAPTER 25

The Houses Called Illegal

A bulldozer can measure a wall, not the years of life inside it



A house can be described as illegal in one sentence. A family may have spent twenty years building a life inside it. This does not mean every informal structure must remain forever. Cities need roads, drainage, schools, parks, utilities, emergency access, and safe construction. A government that never plans produces another form of injustice.

But planning without humanity becomes geometry with police. The citizen often faces a strange system. The legal path to land or a permit may be slow, expensive, confusing,

or inaccessible. The family builds because life cannot wait for the file. Years later, the state arrives with sudden efficiency.

The same office that required five years to approve a paper can find a bulldozer by breakfast.

The family is called an encroacher. The wall is marked. The neighborhood waits for the sound of machinery.

Law must be real before punishment becomes real. Rules should be clear, decisions reviewable, and compensation fair. Development should make ordinary lives more secure, not merely make the city photograph better from the air. A wide boulevard can be beautiful. It can also be a monument to families pushed out without remedy.

Those of you who become planners, engineers, lawyers, or officials must resist seeing people as obstacles on a map. Every line crosses somebody's daily life. A modern state must plan. A just state must remember who lives inside the plan.

Informal settlements exist for many reasons: rapid migration, inadequate housing, unclear land administration, corruption, and political decisions that tolerated construction until the land became valuable. Families may lack formal title while holding years of tax receipts, utility payments, and promises from officials. A serious government must protect public land. It must also recognize that its own failures helped create the condition. If authorities allow a settlement to grow for twenty years, connect services, collect payments, and campaign among residents, the sudden discovery of illegality deserves a public explanation.

Justice does not require keeping every structure forever. It requires due process: map the residents, publish the plan, give meaningful notice, hold accessible hearings, compensate fairly, and offer realistic relocation — not land so distant that work and school become impossible. Most importantly, do not let force become the first form of

communication. Bulldozers are efficient at walls and poor at trust.

The deeper issue is who has a right to the city. A modern city needs capital, but it also needs teachers, guards, drivers, cleaners, vendors, and nurses. If they cannot live within practical distance, the city becomes economically irrational and morally divided. Affordable housing is therefore infrastructure. Public transportation is housing policy. Clear land records reduce conflict.

Watch the language. Governments call neighborhoods illegal. Residents call demolition theft. Investors call it renewal. Activists call it displacement. Each word directs sympathy. Good administration begins by describing facts accurately enough that disagreement can be resolved through law. The road may be necessary. The method still matters.

LETTER PAUSE

A bulldozer can measure a wall. It cannot measure the years of life inside it.

Development is not only what is built. It is also what happens to the people moved aside for the building.

INTERLUDE

The National Examination

Grade 12 Leaving Certificate in Political Arithmetic. Time allowed: until further notice.

Question 1. A minister opens a door that was already open. If the ceremony costs 400,000 birr and the door cost 40, calculate the price of the door. Show your working. Do not show it to the minister.

Question 2. President Until Further Notice was elected for one term of five years in 1998. Using the formula Term = 5 years × (Administrative Reasons)^{n}, find the value of n today. Round to the nearest coup.

Question 3. The Chairman’s chair grows 12 centimeters every time his self-confidence falls by one unit. His confidence has fallen 30 units since taking office. How far must the citizen now walk to reach the desk? Express your answer in agricultural zones.

Question 4. A convoy of 27 vehicles travels 5 kilometers to open a bridge. The bridge is 4 meters long. Which arrived first, the convoy or the road? Explain why the road was late.

Question 5. A Permanent Temporary Committee was created for ninety days. It is now twenty years old. Calculate the committee’s age in days, then explain why nobody has calculated it before.

Question 6. (Essay, 20 marks) “A grateful subject receives. A citizen has rights.” Discuss, using an example from your own visit to a government office. Marks will be deducted for gratitude.

Question 7. (Bonus) Where is the toner kept?

END OF EXAMINATION. Results will be announced at a launch event.

Questions for Your Generation

Three questions to argue about before the next part.

1. Which steps of the ladder does your own country still have? Which have been quietly removed?

2. The hyena teaches the victim to protect the silence. Name one silence in your community and who benefits from it.

3. A leader visits a poor man’s house for a photograph. What right, if it existed, would make the visit unnecessary?

PART IV

THE ORDINARY ETHIOPIAN

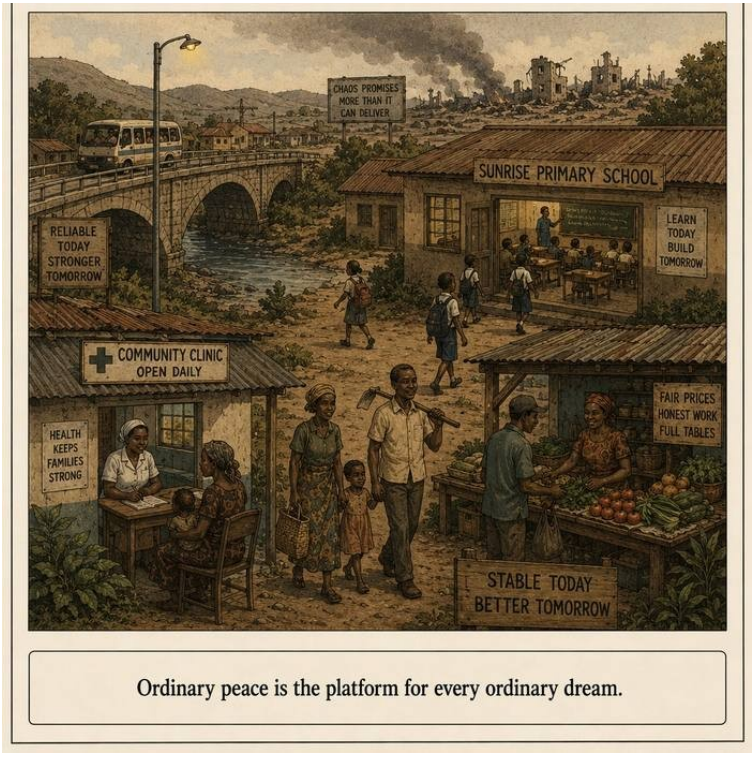
Politics finally enters the kitchen, the passport office, the airport line, the foreign household, and the dangerous boat.

Politics now enters the ordinary life of the citizen: the peaceful year a farmer needs, Professor Alula's passport, the educated woman cleaning abroad, the worker behind the fence, the boat, and the embassy telephone that may or may not answer. These chapters ask what citizenship feels like when it leaves the constitution and reaches a kitchen, an airport, a foreign household, or the sea.

CHAPTER 26

Stability Is Not a Boring Word

Boring peace is more useful than exciting collapse


CHAOS PROMISES MORE THAN IT CAN DELIVER
SUNRISE PRIMARY SCHOOL
LEARN TODAY BUILD TOMORROW
RELIABLE TODAY STRONGER TOMORROW
COMMUNITY CLINIC OPEN DAILY
HEALTH KEEPS FAMILIES STRONG
FAIR PRICES HONEST WORK FULL TABLES
STABLE TODAY BETTER TOMORROW
Ordinary peace is the platform for every ordinary dream.

Stability rarely receives applause.

A bridge that does not collapse is not breaking news. Electricity that remains on does not become a heroic documentary. A school that opens every morning, a court that follows procedure, and a farmer who harvests without hearing gunfire are considered ordinary.

That is the point.

Political movements often make stability sound boring, cowardly, or suspicious. Young people are offered drama:

revolution, cleansing, final victory, historic confrontation, total transformation. Drama is excellent in theater.

It is exhausting in childhood.

Chaos destroys the quiet systems on which ordinary life depends. The truck does not arrive. Medicine spoils. Teachers leave. Investors wait. Farmers reduce planting. Families move. Young people postpone marriage, study, business, and hope.

This does not mean stability should become an excuse for dictatorship. Silence inside a prison is not stability. A government that suppresses every complaint may produce stillness, but stillness created by fear is pressure, not peace.

Real stability includes justice, predictable law, political inclusion, peaceful competition, and institutions trusted enough that losing one election does not feel like losing citizenship. The goal is not a country where nothing changes.

The goal is a country where change does not destroy the floor. A stable society can reform continuously because people do not fear that every disagreement will become war. A business can plan. A student can finish a degree. A researcher can design a ten-year project. A farmer can invest in soil that will not be abandoned next season.

Young Ethiopian, do not let anyone shame you for valuing peace, continuity, and predictable rules. Stability is not a boring word.

It is the condition that allows almost every interesting human achievement to last.

Authoritarian leaders use the word as advertising: criticism becomes instability, elections become risk, protest becomes sabotage, and the leader’s continued rule becomes the definition of peace. That is not the stability I mean. Measure stability from the citizen’s life. Can a farmer plant without fearing that conflict will block the harvest? Can a student begin a degree believing the university will stay open? Can

a family travel between regions without treating identity papers as danger? Can a government lose an election and the electricity remain on? That is stability — and it requires legitimate institutions, not only force. Police can stop a disturbance for a day. Trust prevents the next one.

Economic stability matters too. Inflation can destroy trust quietly. When wages lose value, saving becomes foolish, long-term planning becomes impossible, and corruption becomes easier to justify. Reliable currency, predictable taxation, and transparent budgets may sound technical. They enter every kitchen.

Social stability does not mean sameness. Ethiopia will remain diverse; the goal is to make disagreement nonfatal. A society becomes unstable when people believe only their own group can protect them, so equal citizenship is a security policy. And peace agreements need implementation: a signature stops headlines while displaced families, prisoners, and armed networks remain. Stability is the slow work after the ceremony.

Young people are attracted to dramatic change because gradual improvement looks insufficient. Sometimes drama is necessary. But the destruction of predictability harms the poor first: wealthy people can move money, children, and bodies; the ordinary citizen remains inside the experiment.

Do not confuse boring with weak. A bus arriving on time is boring. So is clean water, regular school, an honest court schedule, a peaceful transfer of office, and a currency that does not produce a new surprise every morning. Boring systems are the hidden architecture of dignity.

The next chapter turns to a small document that contains this entire relationship between citizen and state: the passport Professor Alula refused to surrender.

REMEMBER *Real stability allows lawful change without making ordinary life collapse.*

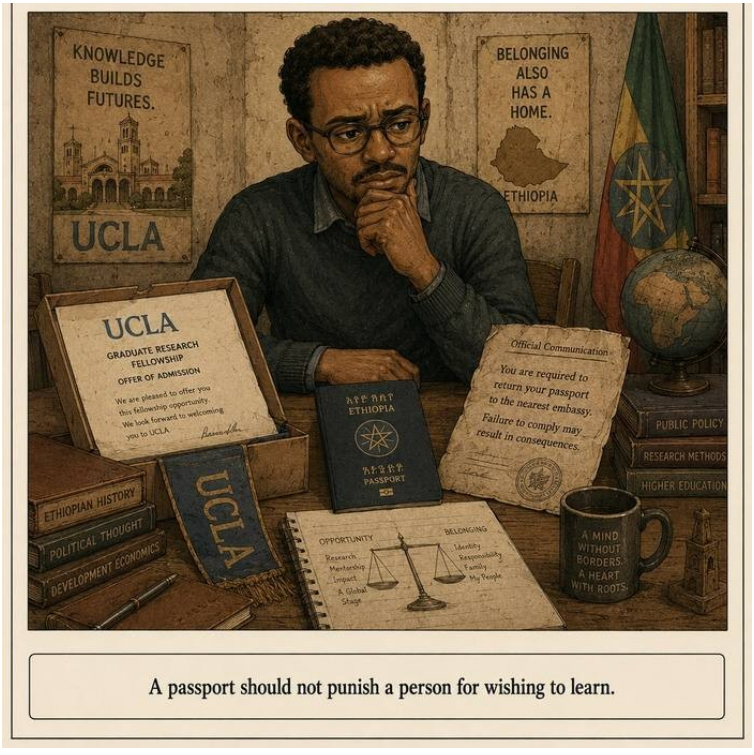
LETTER PAUSE

The most useful stability is not the silence of fear. It is the confidence that lawful change will not destroy ordinary life.

CHAPTER 27

The Passport: Professor Alula’s Choice

When a UCLA opportunity became a question of belonging



There is one story I have never forgotten.

I came to know Professor Alula, an Ethiopian academic who later lived and worked in the United States.

He told me about an experience from the time of Emperor Haile Selassie.

According to his recollection, he was studying at UCLA in the United States. He completed a master’s degree, and UCLA gave him an opportunity to continue toward a Ph.D.

For a young Ethiopian scholar, that was a major opportunity. He wrote back to Ethiopia asking whether he could remain and continue his studies.

The response, as he remembered it, was essentially this: “You may stay—but return your Ethiopian passport.” That changed everything.

The question was no longer only: “Should I continue for a Ph.D.?”

The question became: “What is my country worth to me?”

Professor Alula told me that he chose to return to Ethiopia. Think about that.

A young man had an opportunity to remain at UCLA and continue his education, but the possibility of giving up his Ethiopian passport was too much.

For him, the passport was not a travel document. It was identity, belonging, dignity. It said: “This is my country.”

I remember this story because of what came later. Years afterward, Ethiopia entered another political era. Senior academics at Addis Ababa University were dismissed in the early 1990s. Professor Alula was among the intellectuals affected by that period, and he later continued his academic life abroad. That contrast is painful.

Once, an Ethiopian scholar was willing to give up an opportunity at UCLA rather than give up his Ethiopian passport. Later, Ethiopian politics helped drive scholars like him away. A country that desperately needed educated people lost some of them.

That is more than brain drain. It is a reversal of national confidence.

And this is why I ask young Ethiopians to think carefully about what happened between those two moments.

There was a time when an Ethiopian student could feel: “I may lose an opportunity, but I will not voluntarily lose my country.”

Later, some Ethiopians fleeing war, persecution, or lack of opportunity reached the point where they tried to hide or discard documents identifying where they came from.

The passport did not change. The relationship between the citizen and the country changed. That is the tragedy — and the lesson is not that one generation loved Ethiopia and another did not. The better question is: what happened to the country that changed the meaning of the passport in the minds of some of its own children?

I have preserved this story carefully because it came to me as a personal recollection. I was not present at UCLA and have not seen the correspondence; the story belongs here as testimony. Memory is not an archive, but it is part of history. We should neither treat every recollection as a court-certified document nor discard the human truth because the paper is missing. For Professor Alula, the central fact was the choice: continue the Ph.D. and surrender the passport, or return and keep the document of belonging.

Professor Alula told me what he remembered. I was not present at UCLA, and I have not seen the official correspondence. The story therefore belongs in this book as testimony: one Ethiopian scholar explaining a choice that revealed what citizenship meant to him. That honesty makes the story stronger, not weaker. Memory is not an archive, but it is part of history. A personal account tells us how a person experienced an event, what decision he believed he faced, and what meaning remained decades later. We should neither treat every recollection as a court-certified document nor discard the human truth because the paper is missing. For Professor Alula, the central fact was the choice. Continue the Ph.D. opportunity, but surrender the Ethiopian passport.

Young Ethiopian, different generations may respond differently to that choice. Some will admire the sacrifice. Others will ask why a state would force a talented citizen to choose at all. Both reactions matter.

Patriotism is moving when it is freely given. It becomes dangerous when government demands unnecessary sacrifice and calls the pain proof of loyalty.

A wise country would have wanted him to learn as much as possible and remain connected. It would not have treated citizenship as a rope that must shorten whenever opportunity expands. Love of country should enlarge the citizen's capacity, not imprison it. A passport is paper, ink, a photograph, a seal, a database record — yet people cry when they receive one, protect it in travel, and feel wounded when it is rejected. The state says: you are one of ours. The world asks: what stands behind that statement?

Years after his return, political changes pushed many intellectuals abroad. The reversal is undeniable: a country that needed expertise made expertise feel unsafe. An intellectual can be lost to a country without dying — dismissed, silenced, underemployed, or forced to contribute from far away. Professor Alula protected the passport because it represented Ethiopia. Ethiopia's responsibility was to become a country that protected the person carrying it.

The next chapter follows the same booklet into a very different emotional world, where some migrants come to fear what the passport reveals.

REMEMBER *A country should never force a citizen to choose unnecessarily between belonging and becoming more capable.*

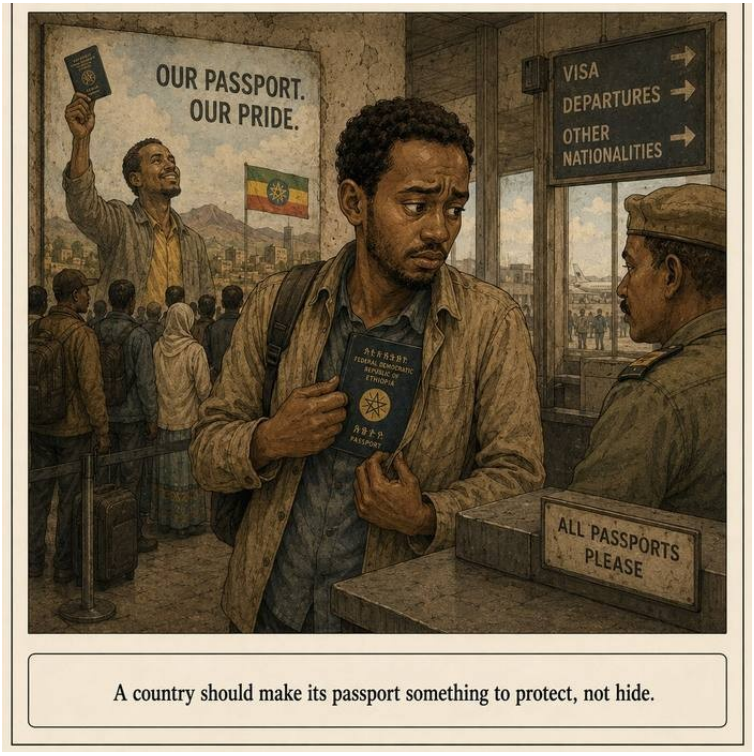
LETTER PAUSE

Professor Alula treated the passport as belonging. A wise country should never waste that love.

CHAPTER 28

From Protecting the Passport to Hiding It

When the same little booklet changes its meaning



Professor Alula returned to Ethiopia because he could not accept the price attached to remaining abroad.

The price was not money, tuition, or another examination. It was his Ethiopian passport. He was willing to lose UCLA rather than surrender the document that said: “This is where I belong.”

Years later, another Ethiopian might arrive at a foreign border with a very different feeling.

Instead of protecting the passport, he might hide it. Instead of saying “This is my country,” he might hope nobody asks where he came from. The booklet did not grow heavier. It did not grow teeth. It did not begin insulting immigration officers. It remained a small document containing a photograph that, for reasons known only to passport offices, makes an innocent person look recently arrested. What changed was the relationship between the citizen and the country behind it.

The Passport With Two Personalities

A passport can behave very differently depending on which country issued it.

One passport reaches an airport counter and seems to say: “Good afternoon. My owner is here for a short visit and will probably leave before the hotel has finished charging unnecessary fees.”

Another passport reaches the same counter and seems to announce: “Please locate a supervisor, prepare fourteen questions, and examine whether this traveler intends to live permanently beside the baggage carousel.”

The person holding it may be a professor, a doctor, a student, a grandmother visiting her children. But before the officer knows the person, the officer sees the country. Is it stable? Are its records trusted? Do its citizens have jobs to return to? Are many arriving with false papers? The traveler may be completely honest. But the passport carries the reputation of millions of people and several governments inside one small cover. That is unfair to the individual. It is also real.

Pride Alone Cannot Open the Gate

An Ethiopian may stand at the airport counter thinking: “Do they know that my country defeated a European colonial army at Adwa?”

The immigration officer may be thinking: “Do you have a return ticket?”

Both thoughts can exist at the same time. History matters. Dignity matters. But the airport computer is not impressed by a speech about ancient civilization. It wants records, addresses, dates, evidence. The modern world has a rude habit of asking countries not what they accomplished a hundred years ago, but what their institutions can verify this morning. This does not mean we should feel inferior; inferiority builds nothing. But pride without performance is a very elegant form of denial. You cannot strengthen a passport by shouting at the airport officer. You strengthen it by building a country whose citizens are expected to travel, study, trade, and return.

Why Would Someone Hide His Own Country?

It is easy to judge an Ethiopian who hides or destroys identifying documents.

We may say: “How can you be ashamed of Ethiopia?”

But shame may not be the whole explanation.

A person fleeing war may believe a document will send him back into danger. A migrant controlled by smugglers may be told to destroy identification. Another may simply have learned, through repeated humiliation, that revealing his nationality changes how people treat him. These decisions may be unwise, even unlawful, and may create greater danger. But before condemning the person, ask what circumstances made his own identity feel like evidence against him. Professor Alula saw the passport and thought: “I cannot give away my country.” Another Ethiopian may see the same document and think: “This country has already given me away.” That is the painful distance between the two stories.

It Is Not Because One Generation Loved Ethiopia More

We should not turn this contrast into a simple moral judgment. It would be easy to say: “Professor Alula’s generation was patriotic. The later generation is not.”

That is too easy.

A young person crossing a desert, working in a foreign kitchen, or sending money home every month may love Ethiopia deeply. Love of country does not always look like remaining inside it. People leave to survive, to support the family that stayed, because their education has no room to breathe, or because politics has made ordinary life impossible. A person can love his home and still run from the fire inside it.

A Country Can Lose Its Own People Before They Leave

Brain drain does not begin at the airport. It begins when a student realizes that talent matters less than connection; when a professor is removed because independent thought makes power uncomfortable; when a doctor cannot find equipment; when a graduate spends years waiting for work unrelated to his education; when a citizen enters an office with a lawful request and leaves feeling like a criminal who interrupted lunch. By the time the person reaches the airport, the departure began years earlier. The body leaves last. The hope departed first.

That is why losing educated people is not a transportation problem, and not solved by saying “Be patriotic. Stay.” Patriotism cannot pay rent. A flag cannot replace laboratory equipment. A patriotic song cannot protect someone from persecution. A country must give talent a reason to remain — and give those who leave a reason to return.

The Country That Educates and Exports

Ethiopia spends family sacrifice, public money, and years of teacher effort educating a young person. Then another economy receives the engineer, nurse, or scientist. We pay for the factory. Someone else receives the product. Then we proudly announce that Ethiopians are succeeding everywhere in the world. That success is real. But ask: why did the person need to travel so far before the talent became useful? A nation should not become famous only for producing excellent people for other nations.

Governments react to national embarrassment by changing symbols: a new passport design, a stronger color, a more impressive emblem, perhaps a lion looking extremely serious about immigration policy. Design matters. But the strength of a passport comes from the country standing behind it. A beautiful passport from an unstable state remains a beautiful problem. A plain passport from a trusted state opens doors. The real redesign happens in the nation: reliable records, peace, employment, law, consular protection, and a political system that does not regularly turn professors into exiles.

The Goal Is Not to Keep Everyone Home

A strong Ethiopia would not imprison its citizens inside national pride. People should travel, study, work, marry, teach, and learn from the world. Professor Alula should not have been forced to choose between advanced education and national identity. A healthy country does not say, “Choose between your future and your passport.” It says, “Go, learn everything you can, remain one of us, and bring knowledge back — physically, intellectually, economically, or through the next generation.” Leaving is not always betrayal. Remaining is not always patriotism. A person can remain in Ethiopia while stealing from it; another can live ten thousand miles away while supporting families, students, and hospitals. Geography does not measure loyalty.

Build a Passport People Protect Freely

Professor Alula's decision was powerful because it was voluntary. But a nation should not survive by demanding that its best people make painful sacrifices. The better future is one in which an Ethiopian can continue a Ph.D., keep citizenship, travel freely, return safely, and contribute without choosing between excellence and identity. Young Ethiopian, do not be ashamed of your passport, and do not worship the booklet while ignoring the country behind it. Carry it with dignity. Tell the truth about its weakness. Work to strengthen what it represents.

The deeper goal is a country whose people do not feel compelled to escape, whose scholars are not driven away, whose citizens are protected abroad, and whose children can imagine a future without first imagining departure. Visa policy also reflects international inequality: a young Ethiopian may need to prove income, property, family ties, and emotional innocence before attending a short conference, while a traveler from a powerful state arrives with fewer questions. This unfairness should anger us intelligently — challenge discrimination, negotiate better mobility, and build the conditions that make return credible. The immigration officer does not know the individual. He sees probabilities attached to a country. That is unfair to the person and revealing about the state.

Diaspora communities can help: legal travel, scholarships, research, businesses, consular accountability. They should not create a second hierarchy in which people with foreign documents become more Ethiopian than those who remained. A passport should open a journey, not determine human worth. Our task is not to shame either man in this chapter. It is to repair the relationship so that citizenship becomes protection rather than evidence against the citizen.

The next chapter turns from the passport to the educated Ethiopian woman whose degree crosses a border but whose professional dignity does not.

REMEMBER *A strong passport is created wherever a country gives its citizens a reason to belong.*

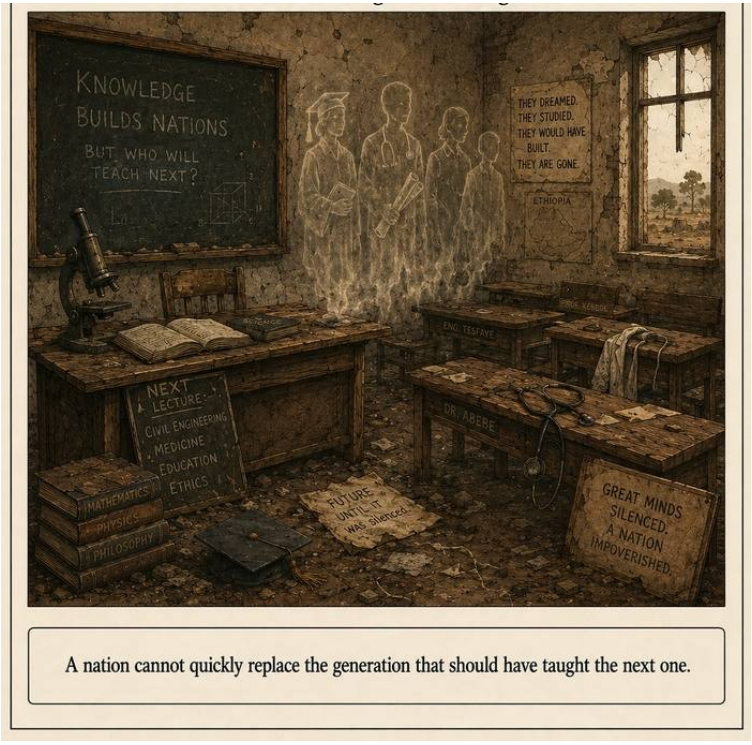
LETTER PAUSE

A passport is small enough for a pocket and large enough to contain the reputation of a state.

CHAPTER 29

The Missing Generation

Ethiopia did not lose only soldiers. It lost the people who would have taught the next generation.



Ethiopia did not lose only soldiers. It lost generations. That difference matters.

When people speak about the tragedies of modern Ethiopian history, they count the dead: those killed during the Red Terror, those killed in wars, those who disappeared, those imprisoned, those who fled and never returned. But there is another loss that is harder to put into a table. It is the loss of the people who would have taught the next generation.

A country can replace a building. It can rebuild a road, buy another truck, even rebuild a university. But replacing a generation of teachers, scientists, doctors, engineers, writers, administrators, experienced workers, parents, and witnesses is much harder. A professor is not manufactured in six months. A physician does not appear because somebody puts a sign saying MEDICAL SCHOOL on a building. A scientist requires decades. A wise public servant may require longer. And when one generation disappears, the next generation loses its teachers.

The Red Terror Took More Than Lives

Here the joking must stop, because some parts of Ethiopian history should not be made funny.

The Red Terror did not simply kill individuals. It broke continuity. Young educated Ethiopians were killed, imprisoned, frightened into silence, displaced, or pushed out of the country. Families lost children. Children lost parents. Universities lost students. Institutions lost the people who might have become their leaders. Political participation became something that could cost a person his freedom or his life. Then came more conflicts, more wars, more imprisonment, more migration — and the losses accumulated.

I remember something Dr. Mugeta told me about his experience in prison. I present it as his account to me, not as an independently documented finding. He described the terrible uncertainty. People waited. People hoped. Sometimes they believed release was coming; a prisoner could begin imagining his family again, his neighborhood, his own bed. Then, according to what he told me, people could disappear. Some never came back. No explanation. No proper goodbye. No certainty about what happened.

Political killing does not end when the person dies. It travels outward. A mother spends decades wondering. A child grows up without a father. A brother searches. A friend learns not to ask questions. A university loses a future

professor. A hospital loses a future doctor. A country loses somebody whose contribution can never be measured because it was never allowed to happen. That is why counting bodies tells only part of the story.

The Missing Teacher

Imagine a country as a long human chain. One generation holds the hand of the generation before it and the generation after it. The older person says: I remember this. We tried this before. This was our mistake. Do not repeat it. Now imagine cutting several sections from that chain. When enough people disappear through execution, prison, war, migration, and repression, the next generation does not merely have fewer citizens. It has fewer witnesses. Fewer mentors. Fewer people who remember what institutions looked like thirty years earlier. Fewer people capable of telling a young person: do not believe that slogan; we heard it before.

Historical memory becomes weak. Institutional memory becomes weak. And when memory becomes weak, old mistakes return wearing new clothes. The young generation thinks: this is something new. The missing generation would have answered: no, we saw this already. But they are not there.

Then Came the Universities

When the EPRDF-led government came to power, there were serious problems of authoritarian rule and restricted political freedom. But history should not become propaganda in either direction. If something useful happened, we should say so. During that period Ethiopia expanded higher education enormously. Universities appeared throughout the country, and large numbers of young Ethiopians gained access to them. For a country that had suffered such intellectual losses, this mattered. Universities began producing engineers, scientists, doctors, teachers, researchers, and administrators. Ethiopia was

beginning to rebuild part of the educated generation it had lost.

Then another problem appeared. We educated them. And many of the best ones left.

The Airport Became Part of the University System

Sometimes it seemed that Ethiopian higher education had an unofficial final examination: can you obtain a visa? Bachelor's degree. Master's degree. Ph.D. Passport. Airport. Goodbye. Germany received some. America received some. Canada, Britain, Australia, the Gulf, and other African countries received some. Ethiopia educated them; the rest of the world employed them.

This became a strange form of foreign aid. A poor country spends years educating a child. The child becomes a scientist, physician, engineer, or professor. A wealthy country looks at the finished product and says: excellent, thank you very much, we can use this person. And Ethiopia returns to kindergarten and starts educating the next one.

When the Foreigner Was Worth More

One experience particularly bothered me. Ethiopian universities sometimes recruited instructors from India and elsewhere because there were not enough qualified academics in certain fields. Nothing is wrong with that; knowledge has no nationality. The problem was the difference in treatment. The numbers that stayed in my memory were roughly two thousand dollars a month for the foreign academic and two hundred for the Ethiopian doing comparable work. The exact figures varied by university, period, and contract, and I present them as recollection, not as a claim about every institution. But the principle bothered me. What message were we sending — that knowledge becomes more valuable after receiving a foreign passport? Does F = ma become ten times more correct when pronounced with a foreign accent? Of course not. Yet

our employment system sometimes behaved as though it did.

It became stranger still for Ethiopian scholars who had lived abroad and obtained another citizenship. They had Ph.D.s, research experience, and networks overseas; they understood Ethiopia and spoke its languages; they could help build laboratories, graduate programs, and whole departments. You would imagine Ethiopia saying: welcome home, we need you. Instead, some discovered that their Ethiopian origin worked against them receiving the expatriate treatment offered to other foreign academics. A professor born elsewhere: international expert! An Ethiopian-born professor with the same foreign citizenship and the same qualification: ah, but you are Ethiopian. Discount. Same Ph.D. Same physics. Same classroom. Different value. It was as though even a small amount of Ethiopian blood activated a special administrative coupon: ETHIOPIAN PROFESSOR — 90% OFF.

The Ethiopian Discount

That joke hides something painful. A country that undervalues its own people teaches them to leave. And the problem goes beyond salary; it is psychological. A society can develop the habit of believing that an idea becomes valuable only after a foreigner repeats it. An Ethiopian professor says something: who asked you? A foreign consultant arrives three years later and says the same thing: excellent international recommendation! Everyone applauds. Then you check the consultant’s report. Footnote 17: the Ethiopian professor. Now he is finally important because somebody from outside has confirmed that he exists.

There is nothing wrong with learning from foreigners. India, Europe, America, China, Japan, and Korea possess knowledge from which Ethiopia should learn. A confident nation learns from everybody. But learning from others is different from assuming that others are automatically

superior. A healthy country says both things: bring excellent people from outside — and do not drive excellent people from inside away.

Brain Drain Is Not Just Migration

We call this brain drain. The phrase sounds harmless, like water leaking from a pipe. The damage is much greater. Suppose Ethiopia loses one excellent professor. It has not lost one employee. That professor might have trained twenty excellent students; some would have become professors and trained twenty more. The loss multiplies through generations. And the professor who leaves does not stop producing knowledge — he teaches, publishes, and trains students somewhere else. His intelligence has not disappeared from humanity. It has disappeared from the institution that desperately needed it.

The Diaspora University of Everything

There is another Ethiopian phenomenon that deserves a little humor. The diaspora contains extraordinary people — doctors, scientists, engineers, nurses, mechanics, shopkeepers, professors — and everybody has the right to participate in politics. A taxi driver has the same vote as a constitutional lawyer. The problem begins when education in one field suddenly becomes proof of expertise in every field.

In the diaspora we sometimes perform academic miracles. A man enters the airplane in Addis Ababa as a chemist. He lands in Washington as a constitutional scholar. Give him two YouTube videos and by Saturday he is a military strategist. By Sunday afternoon he has redesigned Ethiopia’s federal system. Sunday evening he solves the Nile. Before bed he reorganizes the Horn of Africa. Monday morning? Back to the laboratory.

Another is a very successful engineer. Ask him about bridges and I will listen carefully. Then suddenly: “I have developed the permanent constitutional solution for

Ethiopia." When? "Last night." How many constitutional-law books have you read? "None. But I am an engineer." Wonderful. Perhaps tomorrow the constitutional lawyer will repair the airplane. This is not an argument against participation. It is an argument for intellectual humility. A Ph.D. does not mean Doctor of Everything. It means you know a great deal about a very small part of an enormous universe of knowledge — which should make an educated person more humble, not less.

Why Intellectuals Frighten Weak Leaders

This may explain why authoritarian governments so often develop difficult relationships with intellectuals. A genuine intellectual asks a dangerous question: why? Why this war? Why this law? Why is this journalist in prison? Why can this leader remain indefinitely? Why does the foreign professor receive so much more? Why are young people leaving? An insecure government does not enjoy the word why. It prefers another word: yes. Yes, Your Excellency. Yes, Chairman. Yes, Comrade. That is how a society begins rewarding obedience more than intelligence — and then the intelligent people leave. Five years later the government establishes a committee to investigate THE NATIONAL PROBLEM OF BRAIN DRAIN. The brain also has legs. If you repeatedly kick it, eventually it walks away.

Build the Human Being First

Ethiopia does not primarily need taller buildings. It needs stronger people inside them. You can build a campus in three years; building a university culture takes generations. You can buy laboratory equipment; you cannot purchase scientific curiosity in a box. You can import professors; eventually you must produce, respect, retain, and adequately pay your own. You can construct a magnificent parliament building without creating democracy, print a beautiful constitution without creating constitutional government, and build a gigantic palace without producing a great president.

The foundation of the modern nation is the human being: educated, independent-minded, confident without arrogance, patriotic without hatred, open to foreigners without worshipping them, connected to history without being imprisoned by it — and educated enough to remember something educated people sometimes forget: we do not know everything.

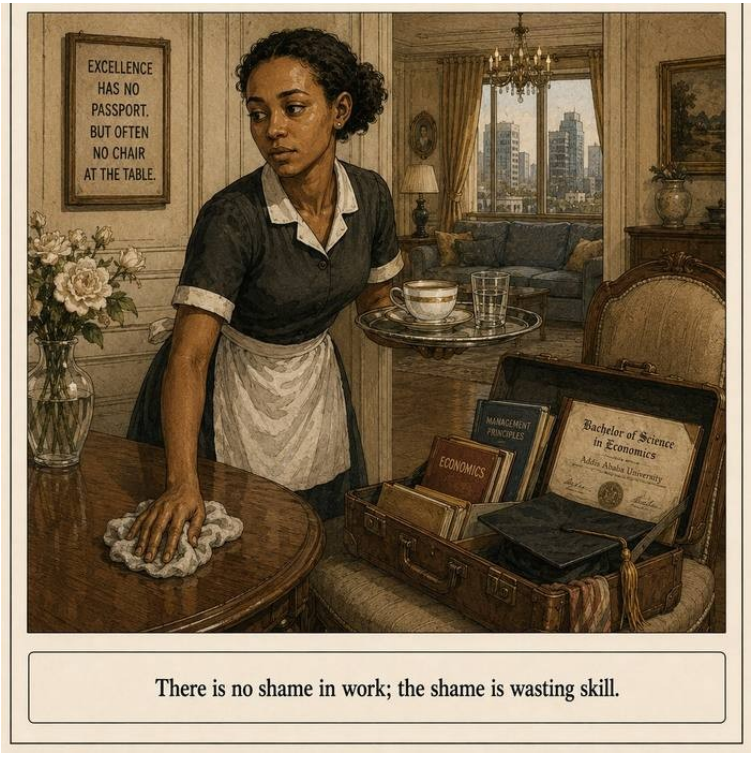
A missing generation does not reappear when politicians announce reconciliation. Chapter 61 returns to that arithmetic in the language of the body. Here the point is the chain. Ethiopia already knows what happens when a country repeatedly loses its young people: eventually there are fewer people left who can say, “We tried this before. Do not make the same mistake.” That is the deepest tragedy of the generation gap. It is not only that people die. It is that experience disappears with them — and a country can then repeat an old tragedy while proudly announcing that it has invented something new.

REMEMBER *A country can rebuild a road in a year. It cannot rebuild the generation that would have taught the next one.*

CHAPTER 30

The Educated Maid

A degree may travel farther than the dignity attached to it


EXCELLENCE HAS NO PASSPORT. BUT OFTEN NO CHAIR AT THE TABLE.
MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES
ECONOMICS
Bachelor of Science in Economics
Addis Ababa University
There is no shame in work; the shame is wasting skill.

Imagine an Ethiopian woman with a university degree. She studied for years. Perhaps she knows accounting, biology, engineering, education, or administration. She crossed a border seeking income because the economy at home did not offer enough work.

In the new country, an employer asks whether she knows how to clean a kitchen.

There is no shame in cleaning. Honest work deserves dignity. The problem is not the work. The problem is the waste. A mind trained at great personal and national

expense is used far below its ability. Her diploma does not disappear, but the labor market cannot see it. Language, licensing, immigration status, discrimination, and urgent financial need push her into whatever work is available.

She may clean the home of a person who has less education than she does. She may help children with homework after the employer assumes she cannot understand the school notice. She may send money home while sleeping in a small room and hiding mistreatment because her legal status is fragile. Then people at home celebrate the remittance and forget the person.

Migration can create opportunity. Many Ethiopians build successful lives abroad. But when large numbers of educated citizens perform work far below their training because their country cannot use them and the destination will not recognize them, both systems are wasting human capacity.

We should respect domestic workers, protect migrant rights, improve skills recognition, teach languages, provide legal pathways, and create real work at home.

We should also stop speaking about migrants as though money arrives by mobile phone without a human body behind it. Every remittance may contain long hours, loneliness, humiliation, risk, and an interrupted career.

Young Ethiopian, never measure a person only by the job visible today. Ask what knowledge, sacrifice, and unrealized ability stand behind it.

A nation grows rich by using the minds of its people, not merely by exporting their hands.

Migration contracts should be transparent. Workers need pre-departure training, verified employers, control of their own documents, legal support, and responsive embassies. Recruitment agencies must be regulated and punished for deception. The receiving country has duties too: a home cannot become a legal vacuum because the workplace has curtains.

The diaspora has responsibilities too. Ethiopians abroad should not reproduce the same hierarchy by mistreating Ethiopian workers. Speaking the same language while withholding wages is not community. Taking a worker to church on Sunday does not excuse controlling her on Monday.

Young Ethiopian, when you hear that somebody is “only a maid,” correct the sentence.

She is a person doing domestic work. She may be supporting several lives. She may have crossed a desert of bureaucracy before entering that kitchen. She may carry a degree in a suitcase and a family in her monthly transfer.

The next chapter remains inside the foreign household, but moves to the worker behind the gate — present in the economy and absent from the social world around him.

REMEMBER *There is no shame in honest work. The shame is wasting skill and removing dignity from the worker.*

LETTER PAUSE

There is no shame in honest work.

The shame is wasting skill and removing dignity from the worker.

A degree in a suitcase is evidence of both human courage and institutional waste.

The Ethiopian Behind the Fence

The gate separates the household from the worker who keeps it running

In many countries, an Ethiopian stands behind a gate. He may be a security guard, caretaker, driver, cleaner, construction worker, or domestic employee. The fence protects a home, office, hotel, or factory belonging to someone else. He opens and closes the gate all day.

Sometimes his own future feels closed.

Perhaps he studied engineering. Perhaps he taught school. Perhaps he once ran a small business. The uniform tells only the current chapter, not the whole book.

The world sees a guard. His family sees the person paying school fees. He sees the career he hoped to have and the responsibility he cannot abandon.

There is dignity in guarding a gate. There is also pain when talent remains trapped behind it.

Migration creates many such mismatches. Credentials are not recognized. Language takes time. Legal status limits options. Networks are absent. The first job becomes the fifth year. Survival postpones reinvention.

At home, we sometimes speak proudly about the diaspora's success while ignoring those doing difficult and invisible work. We notice the person who became a professor or business owner. We do not notice the person working two shifts to send money to relatives who believe he lives comfortably because the photograph was taken beside a clean building.

A humane national policy would prepare migrants better, protect them abroad, negotiate labor rights, support credential recognition, and create enough opportunity at home that leaving is a choice rather than an escape.

A humane culture would stop ranking people by visible occupation.

Young Ethiopian, when you pass a guard, cleaner, maid, driver, or laborer, greet the person. You do not know what country, degree, war, debt, or dream stands behind the uniform.

The gate may belong to the employer.

The dignity belongs to the worker.

Migration produces a strange condition: a person trusted with keys but not treated as equal, invited into every room

for work and into none for belonging. And this is not only about foreign employers. Ethiopians create the same hierarchy at home — the guard, the cleaner, the driver waiting outside become invisible to people who speak loudly about justice.

Character is revealed in downward relationships. It is easy to be polite to the person who can promote you. How do you speak to the person whose livelihood depends on your decision? A society that normalizes humiliation at the bottom will reproduce authoritarianism at the top. The child who watches a worker being insulted learns that status changes how much dignity a person deserves. Later, a public title gives the lesson a uniform.

Labor law matters because kindness is unreliable. Contracts, working hours, wage enforcement, and freedom from retaliation create a floor beneath decency, and workers need organization: unions give one isolated person a voice. Governments often fear independent worker organization because it creates power outside the party. That fear weakens society.

Families should speak honestly about the cost of migration. The relative abroad is not an automatic bank. Foreign currency does not grow on airport luggage. Money sent home may contain overtime, fear, and missed childhoods.

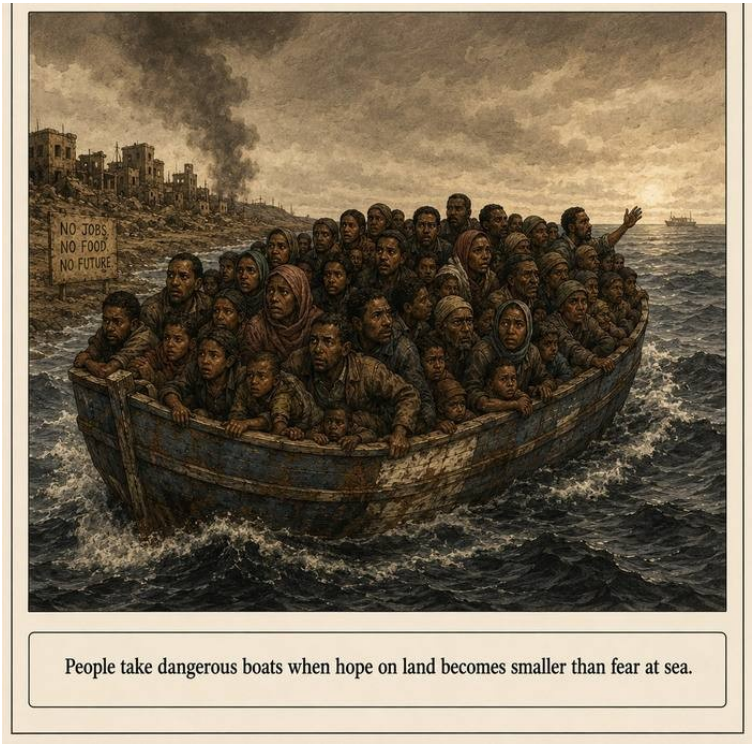
The fence leads us toward a more dangerous boundary: the coast, where some people decide that an uncertain boat is more believable than the future offered on land.

REMEMBER *Character is revealed most clearly in the way we treat people who cannot promote us.*

CHAPTER 31

Why Would Someone Enter That Boat?

People do not enter the sea because the water gave a good speech



A small boat leaves the coast crowded far beyond safety. There is little water, no reliable navigation, no bathroom, no guarantee of arrival, and certainly no brochure promising complimentary dehydration.

Why would anyone enter it?

This question is often asked from a comfortable chair. People do not usually risk the desert, traffickers, detention,

drowning, and exploitation because the journey looks pleasant. They go because the danger ahead appears smaller than the hopelessness behind.

The passenger may be escaping war, political fear, unemployment, debt, family pressure, or a future that feels closed. He may have heard a success story and not the ten failures surrounding it. A smuggler may sell Europe or the Gulf as though selling a bus ticket. Desperation changes mathematics.

A one-in-ten chance of reaching a better life can look rational to someone who believes the chance at home is zero.

This does not mean every decision is wise. Young people can underestimate risk. Families sometimes pressure sons and daughters to leave because a neighbor received money from abroad. Social media shows the apartment, not the detention center; the new shoes, not the night shift.

But ridicule is not an answer.

The serious answer is to change the calculation: peace, jobs, fair recruitment, reliable education, lawful travel routes, information about risks, and a future that rewards patience more than escape. A government cannot stop migration only with warnings. A parent cannot stop it only with tears. A border cannot stop it only with fences.

People stay when staying makes sense.

Before asking why someone entered the boat, ask what happened on land.

Receiving countries have responsibilities too. Border control does not cancel human rights. Rescue at sea is not an endorsement of smuggling; it is a refusal to let policy become drowning.

Migration policy should begin before departure: create work connected to skills, support small businesses with transparent rules, make legal travel possible for study and seasonal work, prosecute trafficking networks and the

officials who enable them, and give young people accurate information from returned migrants rather than dramatic slogans.

The sea is only one danger. Deserts, prisons, extortion, forced labor, and kidnapping line the land routes; men are tortured while captors demand payment from relatives listening by telephone. These are not adventure stories. They are markets built on desperation. Yet the traveler is not a victim without agency; the moral failure lies in the conditions that make exploitation profitable.

Do not mock the person who left or romanticize the journey. If thousands repeatedly choose danger, government should treat the movement as data. The boat is a report card, and it is grading more than migration policy.

REMEMBER *People do not enter the sea because the water gave a good speech.*

The Boat Is the Report Card

Migration reports what the country failed to make believable

The boat is not only a transportation problem. It is a report card. Each passenger says something about the country left behind: that work was unavailable, peace uncertain, institutions untrusted, or patience exhausted. Not every departure is an indictment. Human beings have always traveled, and ambition takes people abroad even from successful countries.

But when departure becomes mass desperation, the pattern speaks. Governments celebrate remittances — the money pays school fees and brings foreign currency. But remittances can become a strange national business model: export the young person, import the sacrifice. The country receives dollars and loses time, skill, parents, and children.

A migrant may succeed, but the nation should not require danger as the entrance examination for opportunity.

The boat also reveals inequality. The wealthy leave by airplane with documents. The poor leave through the desert or sea. Both are migrating, but only one journey is called illegal before it begins. Do not shame those who left or romanticize those who remained. The task is a country where staying, leaving, and returning are all genuine choices. A healthy diaspora connects Ethiopia to knowledge, investment, and ideas. But a diaspora created by fear is a wound before it becomes a network.

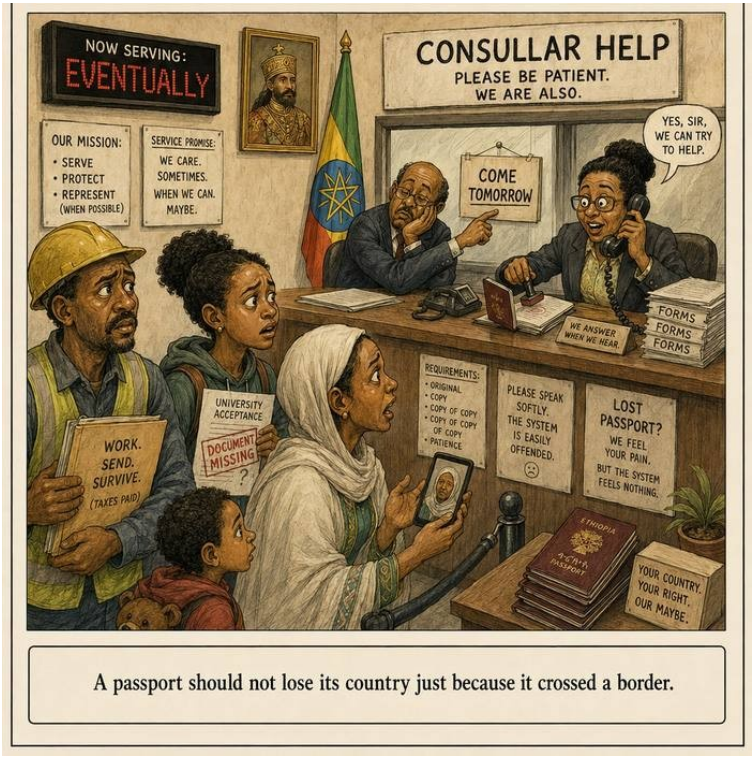
When a young person boards a dangerous boat, the state should not ask only, “How do we stop the boat?” It should ask, “What score did we receive on the report card that sent him there?”

REMEMBER *The boat is a report card. Read it before you grade the passenger.*

CHAPTER 32

The Embassy Is Part of the Passport

Citizenship is tested when the citizen is far from home and needs the state to answer



A passport allows a citizen to leave.

An embassy should remind the citizen that the country did not disappear after departure.

This sounds simple. In practice, many migrants discover that the most distant place in the world is the space between a ringing telephone and a consular office that does not answer. What happens when a domestic worker is

trapped by an employer? When a student loses documents? When a worker dies abroad and the family cannot bring the body home? When a passport expires in a country where the person has no secure status?

The embassy cannot solve every problem. It must obey local law; resources are limited; citizens sometimes ask for what no state can lawfully give. But it can answer. It can maintain emergency contacts, visit detainees where permitted, issue documents efficiently, record abuse, communicate with families, and advocate through diplomatic channels. Silence is the most damaging response, because it confirms the migrant's fear that departure ended the relationship. The state should know its people exist.

Young Ethiopian, national dignity is often discussed in grand rooms. It is tested in ordinary encounters: whether a consular officer answers respectfully, whether fees are clear, whether appointments are possible, whether a vulnerable worker receives guidance, and whether families are informed during crisis.

A country cannot demand that foreign governments respect its citizens while its own offices treat them as interruptions. This is especially important because migrants do not leave as isolated individuals. They carry families, debts, expectations, remittances, and fear. A crisis abroad becomes a crisis in a village or neighborhood at home.

Embassies should therefore treat diaspora communities as citizens, not only as sources of foreign currency, political applause, or fundraising attendance.

The diaspora also has responsibilities. Consular staff are not personal assistants. Documents require evidence. Laws matter. Abuse of systems weakens trust for everyone. Citizens should organize accurate information, support one another, report exploitation, and avoid the rumor economy in which one person on social media becomes the unofficial ministry of immigration.

A strong embassy relationship is built on mutual clarity. It also requires political neutrality. Citizens abroad should not fear that consular services depend on support for the government. A passport belongs to the citizen, not the ruling party. The embassy represents the country, including people who criticize its leaders. This distinction is essential.

When state and party merge, citizenship becomes conditional. The supporter receives access; the critic receives suspicion. The country's flag becomes a campaign logo.

A professional diplomatic service must resist that temptation. The embassy can also become a bridge of knowledge. Diaspora professionals may want to teach short courses, advise institutions, mentor students, invest, collaborate on research, or support local projects. The state should make contribution easier without demanding that return take only one physical form. Some citizens will return permanently.

Some will return for months.

Some will contribute from afar.

Some will raise children who know Ethiopia through family, language, food, faith, music, visits, and stories. Belonging has more than one geography.

Professor Alula's passport story asks what the country meant to one scholar. The embassy asks what the country does when its scholar, worker, student, or domestic employee is outside the border. The booklet and the office should carry the same message: You are still one of us.

The value of a passport is not only how many gates it opens. It is whether the country behind it stands near the citizen when the gate closes.

The embassy is a small laboratory of governance. It shows whether public office understands service. Professor Alula's story began with a country asking what he would surrender to remain abroad. A modern Ethiopian state should ask a

different question: what must we do so that Ethiopians abroad remain protected, connected, and able to contribute freely?

That question takes us into the next part of the letter. I left Ethiopia and worked in several countries. I did not find perfect societies. I found systems, habits, and accumulated capability from which Ethiopia can learn without surrendering itself.

REMEMBER *A passport represents belonging; an embassy proves whether the belonging offers protection.*

INTERLUDE

A Letter From The Ordinary Citizen

One page. No convoy.

To Whom It May Concern (I have been told this person is on leave),

I am writing to inform your office that I have only one stamp left in my life, and I am saving it.

I have brought my birth certificate to prove I was born, my identity card to prove I am the person on the birth certificate, and a letter from the kebele to prove that the identity card is about me. Your clerk has asked for a document proving that the kebele exists. I have brought the kebele chairman. He asked to sit down. There is nowhere to sit; the chair is in his office.

I do not want a title. I do not want a portrait. I want the electricity to be on when I turn on the switch, and I want to be told the truth when it is not. I want my daughter, who has a degree, to find work in the country that gave her the degree. I want the road to remain a road after the ribbon is cut.

I have noticed that the national plan is announced every year. I would like to know if it has ever been read. If it has, please tell me the page where my street is mentioned. I will bring the page to the clerk. Perhaps it will count as a document.

I know the price of bread. I know the length of the queue. I know whether the water is running. If your office ever wishes to know these things, my address is above. It has not changed. Unlike Tomorrow.

Respectfully, and with a stamp I am still not giving you,

The Ordinary Citizen

Questions for Your Generation

Three questions to argue about before the next part.

1. Professor Alula chose the passport over the promotion. What would you have chosen, and what would that choice cost?

2. What is the difference between migration as ambition and migration as a report card?

3. Name three honest jobs your society treats with less respect than they deserve. What changes if that respect returns?

PART V

WHAT I LEARNED OUTSIDE ETHIOPIA

I did not travel in order to compare every country with Ethiopia. Ethiopia followed me anyway.

I did not travel in order to rank civilizations. Science took me to Germany, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and the United States. Ethiopia followed me as a question. What did these societies accumulate? How did knowledge become systems, products, infrastructure, and opportunity? What costs accompanied their achievements? The useful lesson is never 'become them.' It is 'learn how they learned.'

Borrow methods, not inferiority

Living and working in Germany, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and the United States did not teach me that other countries are perfect. It taught me that national capability is built through systems, continuity, work, learning, and the disciplined conversion of ideas into ordinary routines.

Governments prefer report cards they can prepare themselves. They publish growth rates, kilometers of road, numbers of graduates, new industrial parks, housing units, clinics, and investments. These measures matter. A serious country needs data. But people also vote with movement.

When graduates leave, when doctors emigrate, when families send children across dangerous routes, when business owners move capital, and when citizens seek foreign documents, the movement is another kind of statistic.

It says something has become more believable elsewhere. Young Ethiopian, the boat does not prove that everything in Ethiopia is bad. Migrants leave rich countries too. Curiosity, family, education, and ambition move people everywhere. The report becomes alarming when departure feels necessary for dignity and return feels irrational.

A government should ask: Who is leaving?

From which regions and professions?

What reasons do they give?

What did they try before leaving?

What would make them return?

How much does the journey cost families?

What skills are lost?

What abuses occur abroad?

Without this analysis, migration becomes either shame or celebration. One side calls migrants unpatriotic. Another treats every departure as proof of national collapse. Both positions avoid policy. The report card also includes internal migration. A rural family moves to the city because farming income is unstable. A young person leaves a small town because opportunity is concentrated in Addis Ababa. A displaced community moves because conflict made home unsafe. The city then calls new housing illegal while depending on the newcomers' labor.

Movement reveals uneven citizenship.

A development strategy should reduce forced movement without preventing voluntary movement. People should be free to travel, study, work, and return. The goal is not to keep citizens inside a national fence. It is to make staying a

credible option. This requires jobs, but not jobs alone. Young people also want fairness, respect, voice, and the sense that effort can change their future. A job obtained only through connection does not create trust. A business threatened by arbitrary regulation does not create stability. A graduate placed in an unrelated role without growth does not feel included.

Diaspora remittances can hide the weakness for a time. Families survive, foreign currency enters, and officials praise the diaspora. But a country cannot permanently export its most energetic people and import their guilt in monthly transfers.

Young Ethiopian, read the boat honestly.

It is reporting on wages, security, institutions, education, regional inequality, corruption, and hope.

A wise nation does not punish the report card.

It improves the course.

Before we leave the ordinary Ethiopian section, the next chapter asks what citizenship should mean after departure. The embassy is not a distant office. It is part of the passport’s promise. REMEMBER: Do not punish the report card. Improve the course.

LETTER PAUSE Do not punish the report card.

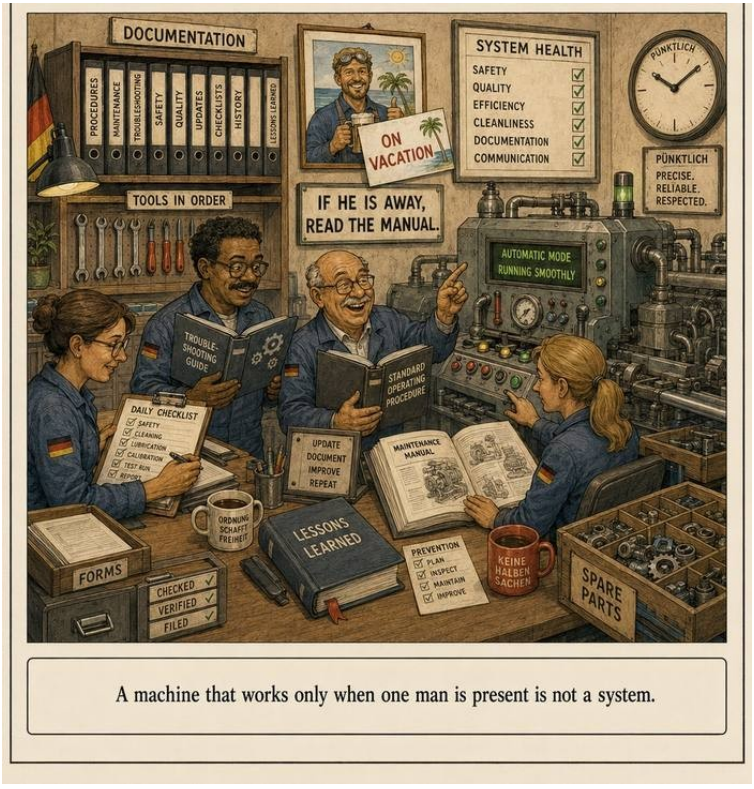
Improve the course.

Migration is movement, but it is also information. Read what the movement is saying.

CHAPTER 33

Germany: Yesterday Became Today’s Foundation

A system should remember what the person forgets



Germany did not teach me that Germans are naturally perfect. They are human. They complain, make mistakes, create paperwork, and sometimes produce a form long enough to qualify as literature. What impressed me was the seriousness of systems. A strong system does not depend on one heroic individual remembering everything. Procedures are written. Responsibilities are defined. Apprenticeship connects learning to work. Maintenance is treated as part of

building, not as an insult to the original builder. In weak systems, a machine works only while one particular technician is present. When he travels, the machine becomes a table. In stronger systems, knowledge is documented, spare parts planned, safety checked, and the next person trained. Germany also showed me the value of continuity. Institutions carry memory through changes of personnel and government. A new minister may change policy, but the entire country does not wake up with a new alphabet.

This does not mean bureaucracy is always efficient. Rules can become rigid. Procedures can suffocate creativity. But the answer to bad rules is better rules, not rulelessness.

Ethiopia needs systems that survive the departure of the founder. A laboratory should not close because the professor retired. A business should not collapse because the owner traveled. A public office should not lose all memory because the director changed.

The lesson is not “become German.”

The lesson is: respect training, documentation, maintenance, standards, and the quiet work that prevents crisis. A country becomes capable when ordinary reliability stops being extraordinary.

The lesson from Germany was not that every German office is efficient or every train arrives with moral perfection. Systems fail there too. People complain. Rules multiply. A person may discover that the correct form exists only to request another form. The deeper lesson was accumulation.

Knowledge is expected to remain after the knowledgeable person leaves. Apprenticeship connects education to practice. Professional standards are not reinvented by each employer. Maintenance is planned. Documentation is part of the work rather than an optional punishment added at the end.

Young Ethiopian, consider the difference between a project and a capability.

A project builds one bridge. Capability trains engineers, inspectors, contractors, material laboratories, procurement systems, maintenance teams, and financing arrangements that can build and preserve many bridges.

Weak development celebrates the object.

Strong development builds the system that can reproduce the object.

This is why foreign aid and imported equipment often disappoint. The machine arrives. The photograph is taken. The training lasts three days. A small part fails six months later. Nobody stocked it, the manual is missing, the trained employee has transferred, and the machine becomes a large table with an international logo.

The failure is not caused by Ethiopian inability. It is caused by treating acquisition as capacity.

Germany’s industrial strength grew through long interaction among education, firms, research institutions, standards, finance, infrastructure, and skilled labor. Ethiopia cannot copy this history, but it can learn the principle: institutions must connect. A technical school should know what local employers need. A company should help train apprentices. A university should solve real problems without becoming merely a consulting office. Government should establish reliable standards and enforce them without selling exceptions.

The system should remember.

This principle also applies to democratic life. Germany’s modern institutions were built after catastrophic historical failure. Memory became part of public education, law, and political restraint. The lesson is not that the country solved every problem. It is that remembrance can be institutional rather than only ceremonial. Ethiopia has painful memories too. They often remain divided among communities, used as evidence for competing innocence. A stronger country would preserve archives, teach evidence, honor victims, and build safeguards from the lessons.

Young Ethiopian, when you enter an institution, ask whether your work will remain usable after you leave. Name the files clearly. Explain the procedure. Train another person. Record why the decision was made. Maintenance is respect for the future. A country advances when yesterday's work becomes today's starting point.

From Germany, I went on learning. Japan offered a different example: a society that rebuilt after devastation without treating defeat as the end of identity.

REMEMBER *A strong system remembers what the individual forgets and teaches what the expert learned.*

LETTER PAUSE

Ask of every project: are we buying an object, or building the capability to reproduce, maintain, and improve it?

CHAPTER 34

Japan: Rebuilding Without Forgetting

Rebuilding requires discipline, continuity, and the ability to learn from defeat

Japan taught me to notice the seriousness given to ordinary work. A task does not need to be glamorous to deserve care. A station, laboratory, workshop, classroom, street, or small shop can be organized with attention because public life is built from small repeated actions.

This is not a fairy tale. Japan has pressure, hierarchy, inequality, aging, and social problems. No country should be copied as a postcard.

But there is a valuable principle: quality is a habit before it becomes a product.

A broom used well can contribute more to public dignity than a speech used badly.

The person who cleans, repairs, prepares, checks, and serves is not automatically inferior to the person holding the microphone. In fact, the microphone often depends on several people who arrived earlier and did not appear in the photograph.

Japan also demonstrated the power of learning from failure. After devastation, the country did not rebuild by pretending nothing had happened. It studied, adapted, manufactured, improved, and accumulated expertise.

Improvement is often small. A process becomes safer. A part becomes more reliable. A worker suggests a better method. The change may be too modest for a national ceremony, but millions of modest improvements become national power.

Ethiopia needs this respect for craft. The mechanic, nurse, farmer, coder, machinist, teacher, and laboratory technician should be able to build mastery over a lifetime.

We speak often about leadership. We speak less about workmanship.

A nation cannot be excellent only at the top. Quality must reach the screw, the record, the classroom, the clinic, and the cup of coffee served when no camera is present.

Japan’s modern history contains empire, war, destruction, reconstruction, technological achievement, social discipline, and difficult contradictions. I do not present it as a moral fairy tale. What impressed me was the seriousness with which ordinary systems were maintained and collective standards were practiced. A clean public space is not

created by one heroic cleaner. It reflects repeated habits, design, enforcement, education, and the expectation that the next person also belongs there. A reliable product is not produced by one final inspection. Quality is built through the process.

Young Ethiopian, we often treat quality control as a person standing at the end, discovering what everyone else did badly. Stronger systems design the work so that errors are prevented, detected early, and corrected without hiding them. This requires a culture in which reporting a problem is not automatically treated as betrayal.

In insecure organizations, the worker hides defects because the boss punishes bad news. The defect travels forward. By the time it appears publicly, repair is expensive and blame is everywhere. A mature organization asks: what process allowed this error?

This does not remove individual responsibility. It makes responsibility useful.

Japan also demonstrates the value of long-term thinking. Infrastructure, education, research, manufacturing, and urban systems develop across decades. Political debate continues, but national capability is not expected to emerge from a single announcement.

Ethiopian politics often compresses time. A leader promises transformation in one term. A project is rushed for an anniversary. A new institution receives a large name before it has staff. Citizens become cynical because every plan arrives with historical language and ordinary implementation.

Young Ethiopian, learn to respect slow excellence. A tree does not become less important because it cannot be launched.

Reconstruction also depends on collective willingness to learn from failure. Defeat can produce denial, revenge, or reform. Japan’s postwar transformation involved external occupation and internal change under conditions unlike

Ethiopia's. The details cannot be copied. The principle remains: a society can preserve cultural identity while altering institutions, priorities, and methods. Discipline should not be romanticized either. Excessive pressure, conformity, overwork, and social exclusion can accompany high performance. Ethiopia should learn punctuality and quality without copying every burden. The goal is not to become another society. It is to examine what makes useful behavior normal.

Consider time. When a meeting starts late, the cost is distributed among everyone waiting. Chronic lateness is therefore not a charming national personality. It is a small transfer of life from the punctual to the powerful.

Respecting time is respecting people.

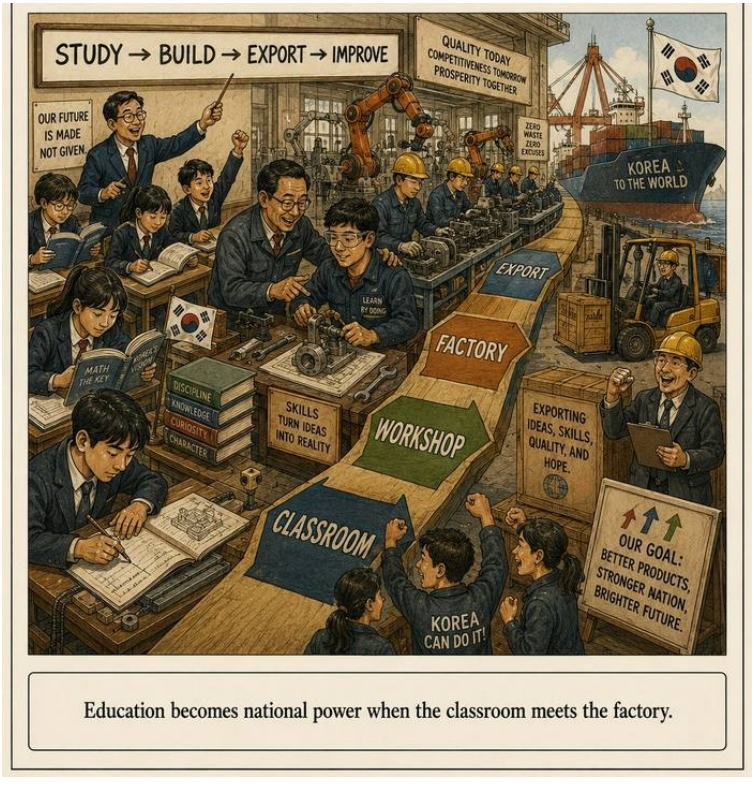
From Japan, the letter moves to South Korea, where education was connected aggressively to national economic transformation. The lesson is not simply "study more." It is "study toward capability." REMEMBER: Slow excellence is still excellence. Maintenance is respect for the future.

REMEMBER *Japan rebuilt without erasing itself. Modernity is what you add, not only what you discard.*

CHAPTER 35

Korea: Education with an Economic Destination

Education becomes power when it is connected to production



South Korea showed me the power of urgency.

It developed through education, industrial ambition, export discipline, infrastructure, and a national determination to move from poverty toward capability. The path was not simple or painless. It included authoritarian periods, labor struggle, pressure, inequality, and enormous personal sacrifice.

So the lesson is not to romanticize speed.

The lesson is that a country can organize around a serious goal. Korea did not wait for perfect conditions before building skills. It learned, manufactured, exported, improved, and moved into more complex industries. Education was connected to national ambition. Firms were expected to compete beyond the domestic market. A small economy cannot become strong by protecting every weakness forever. At some point, products must survive contact with customers who are not patriotic.

Ethiopia often possesses plans without urgency and urgency without plans. A crisis produces activity; when the crisis fades, the files sleep.

We need disciplined urgency: clear goals, timelines, responsibility, measurement, and the courage to stop projects that do not work. We also need humane limits. Development that produces only exhausted students and workers is incomplete. A nation is not a machine for converting sleep into output.

The strongest lesson is that poverty need not become identity. A country can decide that today's limitation will not be tomorrow's excuse.

But the decision must enter schools, factories, budgets, research, and work — not remain inside speeches about transformation. Ethiopia values education deeply. Families sell assets, move homes, and accept hardship so children can study. Students endure crowded rooms, limited materials, and uncertain prospects. The desire exists. The painful question is what education connects to afterward. South Korea's development is often summarized too quickly: the people worked hard, studied hard, and became rich. That description hides policy, industrial strategy, international conditions, authoritarian periods, labor sacrifice, investment, export markets, and institutional coordination.

Still, one lesson is clear. Education was connected to an economic destination.

Engineers entered industries. Technical skills met production. Firms learned to improve quality and compete. Government, education, and business interacted around capability.

Young Ethiopian, a university degree should not be a waiting room for government employment.

Higher education must include broad intellectual formation, not only job training. A society needs historians, philosophers, artists, pure scientists, and critics whose value cannot be reduced to immediate salary. But mass education that ignores labor demand creates frustration and waste.

Students need accurate information about fields, skills, and opportunities. Technical and vocational education must not be treated as punishment for those who failed an academic route. Skilled electricians, machinists, welders, laboratory technicians, agricultural specialists, coders, nurses, and construction professionals are builders of modern power.

The status hierarchy must change.

A country cannot become industrial while everybody wants an office and nobody wants the workshop.

Korea also shows that export success requires learning. Early products may be imperfect. Firms improve through feedback, investment, standards, and competition. Ethiopian enterprises need room to learn, but protection should not become permanent shelter for poor quality. Public support must be tied to performance. Research matters. Universities should collaborate with industry and government while preserving academic independence. A professor should be able to investigate a national problem without being required to praise the policy before measuring it. Language skill is part of capability too. Students need strong Ethiopian-language education and access to global scientific communication. This is not a

choice between identity and English. A person can think deeply in one language and communicate technically in another. Translation should expand knowledge rather than create shame.

Young Ethiopian, do not collect certificates without collecting ability. Ask yourself what you can design, explain, repair, measure, write, organize, teach, or improve.

Education becomes national power when knowledge enters productive systems and remains governed by ethics. The Korean example also carries warnings: intense competition, inequality, pressure, and overwork can damage human life. Development should serve people, not convert every child into a national production unit.

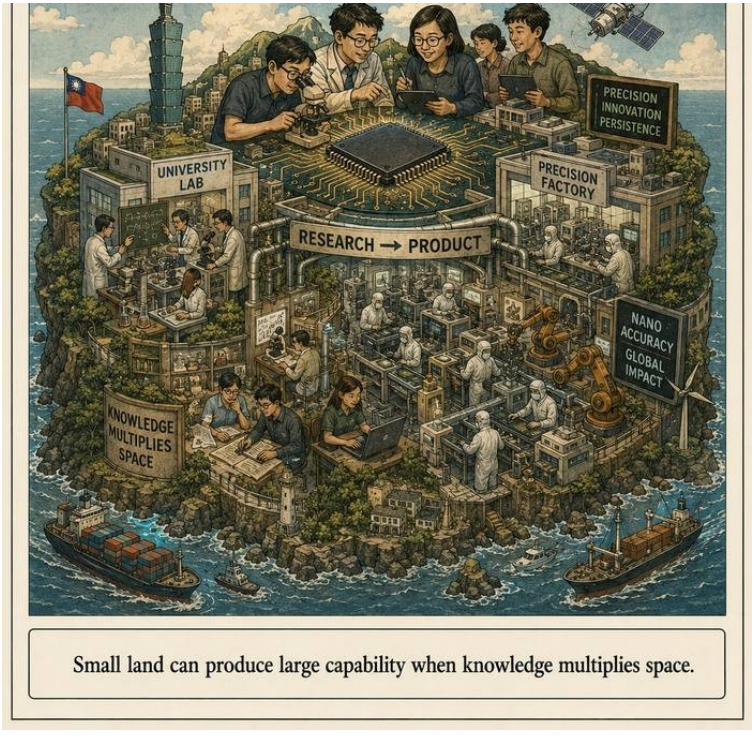
From Korea, I learned to ask where education goes. From Taiwan, I learned how a relatively small place can build large capability by concentrating on knowledge, manufacturing networks, and practical problem solving.

REMEMBER *Education becomes national power when knowledge reaches production without losing ethics.*

CHAPTER 36

Taiwan: Small Land, Large Capability

Small territory does not require small ambition



Taiwan is not large in land, yet it built large capability. It invested in education, engineering, manufacturing, research, and the practical connection between universities, industry, and global markets. The island did not wait to become geographically bigger before thinking technologically bigger.

This matters for Ethiopia because we often speak about resources as though size automatically creates strength.

Taiwan reminds us that knowledge can multiply limited space.

A laboratory result becomes a process. A process becomes a product. A product enters a supply chain. Skills accumulate around the industry. The next generation begins with more than the previous one.

This requires institutions that connect theory to practice. Universities should not become islands surrounded by unemployment. Industry should not treat research as decoration. Government should not announce innovation while importing every technical decision.

Taiwan also taught me the value of practical adaptation. A country does not need to invent every technology first. It can learn, improve, specialize, and become indispensable in selected areas. Ethiopia does not need to produce everything. It needs to become reliably good at enough things that the world has a reason to buy, partner, invest, and learn from us.

That can include agriculture, food processing, energy, logistics, medicine, software, manufacturing, tourism, culture, and scientific services — but only if quality, standards, and continuity are real. Geography sets the stage.

Capability writes the play.

Taiwan’s physical size did not prevent it from becoming important in global technology and manufacturing. Geography sets conditions. It does not issue a final verdict.

Ethiopia is large, with varied climates, resources, and population. We sometimes list these advantages as though the list itself were production. Taiwan reminds us that limited resources can sharpen strategy when institutions invest in people and connect learning to industry.

Young Ethiopian, capability grows through ecosystems. A successful technology firm does not stand alone. It relies on suppliers, universities, laboratories, logistics, finance,

standards, reliable electricity, skilled workers, intellectual property rules, and customers who demand quality. Public policy can help build these connections over time.

Ethiopia often searches for one giant investor or one dramatic project. The announcement becomes development. But resilient growth frequently comes from networks of smaller firms learning together, supplying one another, and moving into higher-value work.

Small and medium enterprises need more than credit. They need predictable regulation, technical support, market information, quality certification, dispute resolution, and infrastructure. A loan to a business without reliable electricity may finance an expensive waiting room.

Taiwan also invested heavily in technical education and research institutions that translated knowledge into industrial capability. Ethiopia should strengthen institutions that sit between theory and production: testing laboratories, extension services, design centers, incubators with real expertise, and manufacturing support. Agriculture can follow the same model. Farmers need research, irrigation, storage, veterinary services, transport, processing, and market information. Productivity is not created by telling farmers to work harder. It is created by systems that make effort yield more. The lesson includes flexibility. Economies move from simple production toward more complex tasks by learning continuously. A policy successful at one stage may become a constraint at another. Institutions must evaluate and adapt.

Young Ethiopian, do not let national pride become fear of specialization. A country does not need to produce everything immediately. It needs to choose areas where it can build depth, connect to markets, and move upward.

The diaspora can contribute technical networks, investment, and market access. But a diaspora investor should not receive exemption from accountability. Patriotism is not a substitute for quality or fair labor.

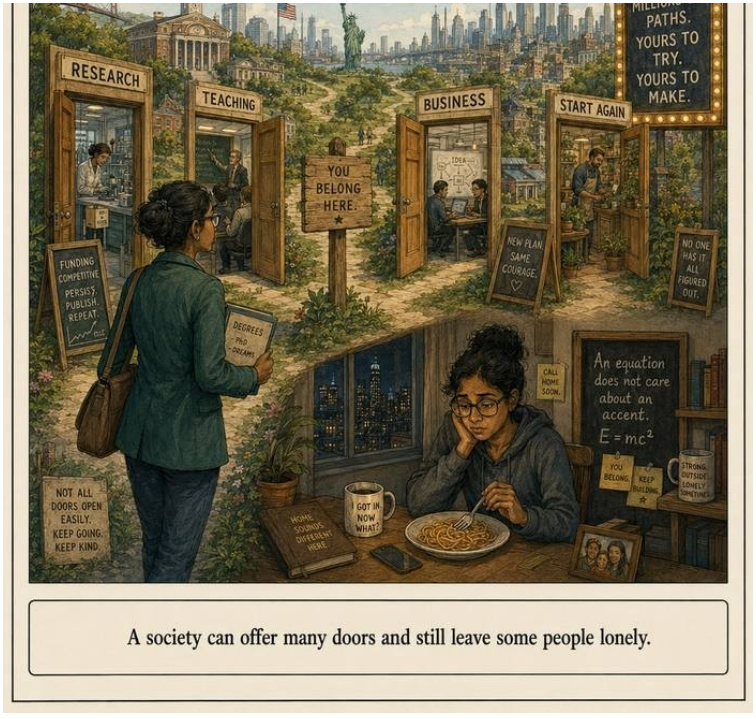
Taiwan’s political and geopolitical history is unique and sensitive. Ethiopia should not copy its circumstances. The useful question is narrower: how did a society build institutions capable of turning education and coordinated effort into products the world needed? That question leads naturally to the United States, where scale, innovation, immigration, inequality, openness, and loneliness coexist in ways that resist simple praise or condemnation. REMEMBER: Small territory does not require small ambition; it requires strategic capability.

REMEMBER *A small country with large capability outperforms a large country with small systems.*

CHAPTER 37

America: Opportunity, Scale, and the Cost of Loneliness

Opportunity can be enormous without making a society perfect


RESEARCH
TEACHING
BUSINESS
START AGAIN
PATHS. YOURS TO TRY. YOURS TO MAKE.
YOU BELONG HERE.
FUNDING COMPETITIVE PERSIST? PUBLISH REPEAT
DEGREES PhD DREAMS
NEW PLAN SAME COURAGE
NO ONE HAS IT ALL FIGURED OUT
An equation does not care about an accent. E = mc²
CALL HOME SOON
NOT ALL DOORS OPEN EASILY. KEEP GOING. KEEP KIND.
HOME SOUNDS DIFFERENT HERE
GOT IN. NOW WHAT?
A society can offer many doors and still leave some people lonely.

The United States taught me the power of reinvention. A person can arrive with an accent, foreign degree, unfamiliar name, and a history nobody in the room knows. In many settings, that person can still teach, research, build a business, change careers, or begin again.

An equation does not care about an accent.

This openness is one reason America attracts talent. Institutions, universities, markets, and professional networks can give newcomers a path into contribution.

But America also taught me not to confuse opportunity with equality. Doors may be open, yet some people stand much farther away. Wealth, race, neighborhood, education, immigration status, and family background shape who can use the freedom available. No country is a finished lesson.

What Ethiopia can learn is the value of allowing people to try, fail, move, speak, organize, and create without asking permission from every office. A society needs room for experiments that government did not design.

We can also learn the value of institutions that outlast individual leaders. Political conflict can be intense, but the country is not supposed to be the private property of the current officeholder. At the same time, Ethiopia should not import every American habit. Individualism without community can produce loneliness.

Wealth without social responsibility can harden inequality. Freedom without truth can fill the public square with noise. The lesson is not imitation. It is selection.

Take the openness to talent, the culture of initiative, the protection of inquiry, and the belief that a person can begin again. Leave behind the assumption that success excuses every inequality. America can make a newcomer feel that reinvention is possible. A person arrives with an accent, incomplete network, and uncertain understanding of the system. In many fields, useful work can still open doors. Universities, laboratories, businesses, philanthropy, and professional networks operate at enormous scale. Failure is often treated as experience rather than permanent disgrace. This openness is real.

So are inequality, racial injustice, political polarization, expensive healthcare, loneliness, homelessness, violence, and the unequal starting points hidden behind the language of opportunity. Young Ethiopian, do not turn America into

either paradise or proof of moral collapse. Learn to observe without surrendering judgment.

One powerful feature is institutional competition. Universities compete for students and research. States and cities try different policies. Businesses rise and fail. Courts can check government. Media institutions investigate, though they also chase attention and reflect political divisions.

Plural centers of power create conflict. They also make total control more difficult.

Ethiopia's political culture often seeks one correct national voice. America shows both the energy and chaos of many voices. The lesson is not to copy the noise. It is to protect spaces where ideas, institutions, and people can organize without waiting for central permission.

Innovation also depends on tolerance for unusual people. A creative society must allow somebody to ask an inconvenient question, pursue an uncertain idea, and fail without social death. Standardization is necessary for safety and quality; excessive conformity kills discovery.

The United States benefits from immigrants educated partly by other societies. Ethiopian professionals contribute to hospitals, universities, companies, schools, transport, care work, and entrepreneurship. This success should make us proud and uncomfortable.

Why did the ability become more visible after departure? The answer is not simply that America is better or Ethiopia is worse. Scale, resources, networks, institutional maturity, and opportunity interact. The question for Ethiopia is which conditions can be built at home so that talent does not require exile to become useful.

America also taught me about civic habit. Many people volunteer, donate, organize locally, attend school-board meetings, build associations, and use courts. Not everyone participates, and money can distort politics. Still, citizenship is often practiced outside election day.

Ethiopia needs a civic culture that does not reduce all organization to government or opposition. Professional societies, neighborhood groups, parent associations, charities, research networks, and local initiatives create social capability. Young Ethiopian, opportunity without community can produce loneliness. Community without opportunity can produce confinement. A healthy country needs both.

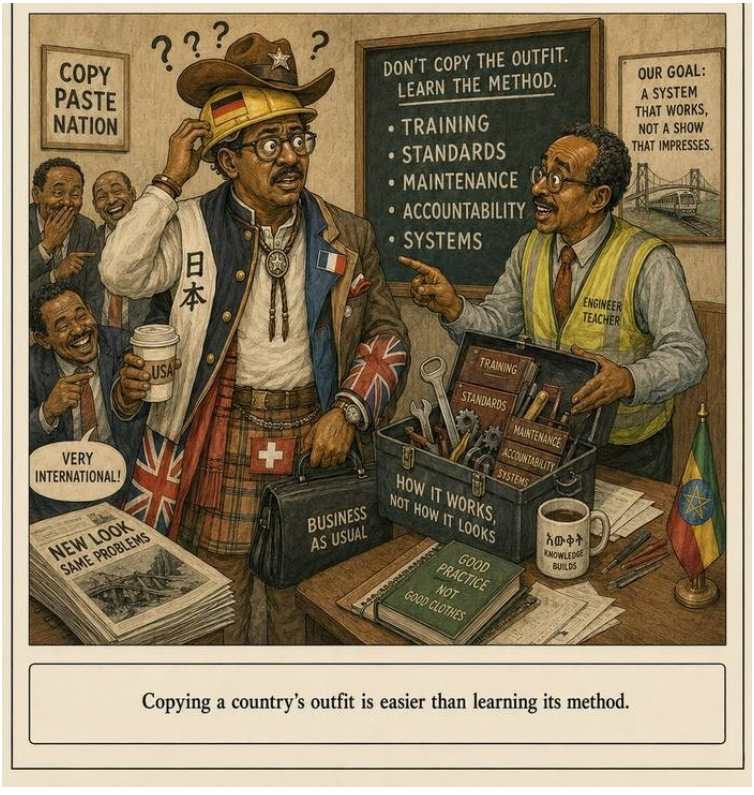
My travels did not teach me to copy any nation. They taught me to ask how societies learn, preserve knowledge, correct failure, and make useful behavior normal. That is the subject of the next chapter. REMEMBER: Opportunity and community are both necessary. Either one without the other can wound people.

REMEMBER *Opportunity without community produces loneliness; community without opportunity produces departure. A country needs both.*

CHAPTER 38

Do Not Copy a Country — Learn How It Learns

The best foreign lesson is a method, not a costume



After living and working in several countries, I learned that comparison can become unhealthy very quickly.

A visitor sees a clean train station and announces that the people are naturally disciplined. He sees traffic in Addis Ababa and announces that Ethiopians are naturally disorderly. He has converted two observations into a theory of civilization before reaching the hotel.

This is not serious learning.

Countries are systems, histories, incentives, laws, habits, technologies, and institutions. People respond to the environment around them. The same Ethiopian who fights a queue at one office may stand patiently in a queue where rules are clear and cheating has consequences. The same person who arrives late to a meeting with no agenda may arrive early when the work is meaningful and the train is reliable.

Culture matters. Systems matter too.

The useful question is not, “Why are Germans German?”

It is, “How is technical training connected to work? How are standards maintained? What happens when a service fails? How does an institution preserve knowledge after staff change?”

The useful question about Japan is not, “How can Ethiopians become Japanese?”

It is, “How did a society rebuild capability, value quality, coordinate institutions, and combine inherited culture with modern production?”

The useful question about Korea or Taiwan is not, “Which miracle can we import?”

It is, “How did education, industrial policy, firms, infrastructure, export discipline, research, and political change interact over time and which parts fit Ethiopian conditions?”

The useful question about the United States is not, “How can we become America?”

It is, “How do scale, universities, capital, immigration, competition, law, and experimentation create opportunity — and what costs in inequality, loneliness, exclusion, and instability must not be ignored?”

Copying is attractive because it avoids thinking. A consultant presents a model. A ministry adopts the

language. New acronyms are printed. Officials travel for study visits. A pilot project is launched in a district selected partly because the hotel is convenient. Two years later the project ends, and the report concludes that local capacity should be strengthened. The local capacity was present. It was not invited to design the project.

Adaptation begins with listening.

What problem are we solving?

What resources exist?

What incentives shape behavior?

Which institution can maintain the program after donors leave?

How will local languages, geography, farming systems, informal markets, religious institutions, federal arrangements, and community trust affect implementation?

What happened the last time a similar project was attempted? A policy becomes Ethiopian not because the cover uses green, yellow, and red. It becomes Ethiopian because it works within Ethiopian reality while improving that reality.

Young Ethiopian, travel if you can. Read widely if you cannot. But do not return from one week abroad with a complete theory of your country. Airports are not graduate schools, although the waiting can feel long enough.

Learn methods: How to measure.

How to maintain.

How to train.

How to document.

How to test a pilot.

How to admit failure.

How to scale what works.

How to preserve public trust.

How to change leadership without destroying institutional memory.

These methods travel better than national costumes. Ethiopia does not need to become a copy. It needs to become a learning state — one that compares, experiments, evaluates, adapts, and remembers.

A country that learns can remain itself while changing.

A country that only copies changes its vocabulary and remains the same.

REMEMBER *Borrow methods, not identities. The goal is not to imitate a country but to build an Ethiopia capable of learning from every country.*

LETTER PAUSE

Learning from another society requires confidence: enough humility to observe and enough identity to adapt.

Questions for Your Generation

Three questions to argue about before the next part.

1. Choose one country in this part. Name one method worth borrowing — and one thing you would refuse to copy.

2. Why does the book warn against “inheriting inferiority” while learning from abroad?

3. What did Germany or Japan keep from yesterday in order to build today?

PART VI

WHY ARE WE STILL POOR?

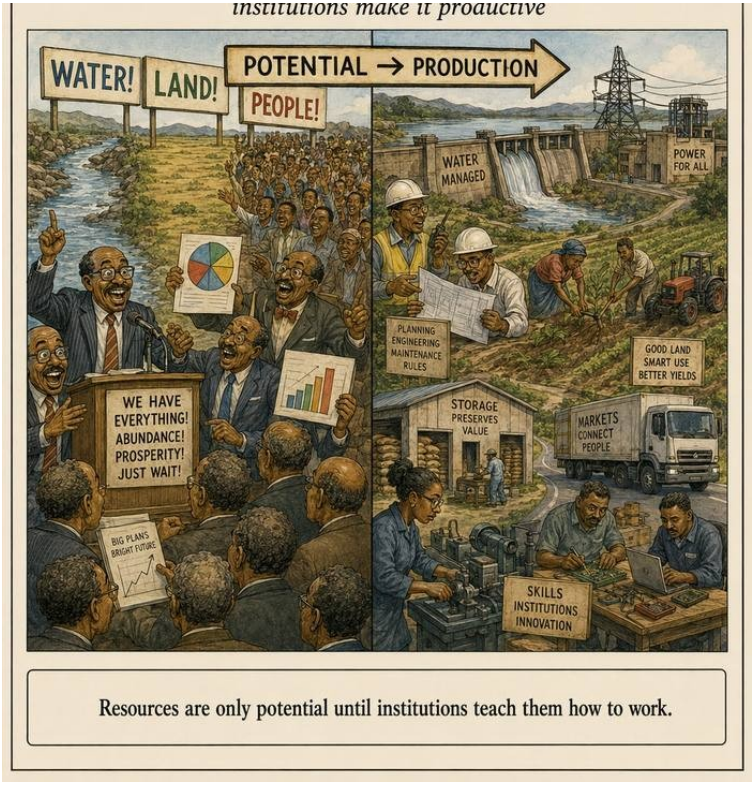
Natural wealth is a possibility. Productive systems turn possibility into food, work, knowledge, and dignity.

Ethiopia is not poor because its people lack intelligence or because the land contains nothing. Possibility exists. The hard question is how possibility becomes productivity, public revenue, fair opportunity, and lasting capability. This part moves from resources to work, systems, modern power, and the office where a simple paper develops a full political career.

CHAPTER 39

Water, Land, and People — So What?

A resource is not wealth until knowledge and institutions make it productive



Ethiopia has water. Ethiopia has land. Ethiopia has people.

These statements are true. They are also incomplete. A river does not generate electricity because a minister describes it passionately. Land does not feed a city because a conference calls it fertile. A young population does not become a productive workforce because a demographic chart is colorful.

Potential is not production.

Water becomes power through engineering, finance, construction, maintenance, transmission, law, and peace. Land becomes food through soil knowledge, seed, irrigation, roads, storage, credit, markets, and secure rights. People become national capability through health, education, discipline, opportunity, and institutions that use talent.

Every resource requires organization.

This is why countries with fewer natural advantages can become wealthier than countries with more. They convert limited resources more effectively and waste less time fighting over the promise. We often speak as though Ethiopia is rich but unlucky. Luck matters, but organization is not luck.

A warehouse that prevents grain from rotting is national wealth. A road that lets a farmer reach market is national wealth. A transparent contract is national wealth. A skilled technician who keeps a turbine running is national wealth. Peace during harvest is national wealth.

Learn to ask the second question. Not only: what do we have? But: what system converts it into value, who maintains that system, and how is the value shared? Resources are invitations. They are not completed achievements.

Minerals need transparent contracts, monitored environmental damage, consulted communities, and punished corruption; resource wealth without accountability intensifies conflict, because control of the state becomes control of the deposit. And people become power only when children are healthy, educated, and employed. A large number of undernourished, unemployed young people is not automatically an advantage. It is a warning.

Slogans about natural wealth are dangerous because they suggest prosperity is waiting under the soil for a strong leader to announce it. Prosperity is organized. It requires boring institutions: surveys, property records, contracts,

courts, tax systems, schools, laboratories, roads, and maintenance.

Demand evidence when someone says a resource will transform the country. How much will it cost? Who carries the risk? Who receives the revenue? What happens when the price falls? What institution audits the agreement? Resources do not remove the need for politics. They make good politics more necessary.

LETTER PAUSE

A resource is not wealth until knowledge and institutions turn possibility into public value.

Water, land, minerals, and population are possibilities. Institutions decide whether possibility becomes shared wealth.

Resources Do Not Make a Country Rich

Oil, rivers, minerals, and fertile land do not govern themselves

A country can possess oil, gold, fertile land, forests, minerals, and rivers and still remain poor.

Resources can finance development. They can also finance corruption, conflict, waste, and the confidence of leaders who believe geology has replaced governance.

Gold underground is valuable, but it is not yet a school, factory, hospital, or research program. Until knowledge, law, investment, labor, and institutions convert it, it remains very expensive dirt. The same is true of agricultural products. A coffee bean may leave the country cheaply and return as an expensive branded experience in a cup served under better lighting.

The difference is not the bean.

It is processing, quality control, design, finance, logistics, marketing, intellectual property, and the institutions that coordinate all of them.

A resource-rich country can become dependent on selling raw materials while importing finished products. This keeps the most profitable knowledge elsewhere.

The goal should be to move up the chain: process more, design more, maintain more, own more, and learn more.

But value addition requires consistency. A buyer needs the same quality next month. A factory needs electricity. A lender needs contracts. A worker needs training. A truck needs a road. A researcher needs equipment. A business needs peace more than another speech about entrepreneurship.

National wealth is organized knowledge applied repeatedly. A country can be rich underground and poor above it: money enters the state faster than institutions can manage it, political groups fight for control, corruption expands, and citizens become dependent on distribution rather than production. The resource becomes a prize.

Sustainable wealth is not what a country extracts. It is what the country learns to do. Human capital, reliable institutions, and social trust keep creating value after a mine closes or a price falls — so resource revenue should be invested in capability, not consumed by present politics, and local communities must see legitimate benefit or extraction becomes another form of dispossession.

Agricultural resources require equal seriousness. Ethiopia has farmers with deep practical knowledge, yet productivity can remain low because inputs, irrigation, finance, extension, storage, transport, and markets are weak. Blaming the farmer is easier than building the system.

Urban economies also need production. Construction can create jobs and assets, but an economy cannot depend forever on buildings exchanging value among people whose incomes come from building more buildings. Manufacturing, services, agriculture, technology, tourism, and creative industries must generate goods and knowledge others will pay for.

Coffee illustrates the problem. Ethiopia's connection to coffee is profound, yet much of the final value is captured through branding, roasting, retail, and customer experience elsewhere. Pride in origin should be matched by strategy across the value chain — the same for leather, textiles, minerals, software, and cultural goods. Development is not achieved by adding the word "industrial" to a park. And wealth includes time: a citizen who spends days obtaining a permit is losing productive life. Administrative reform is economic policy.

Resources can support development. They cannot substitute for the daily work of building capability.

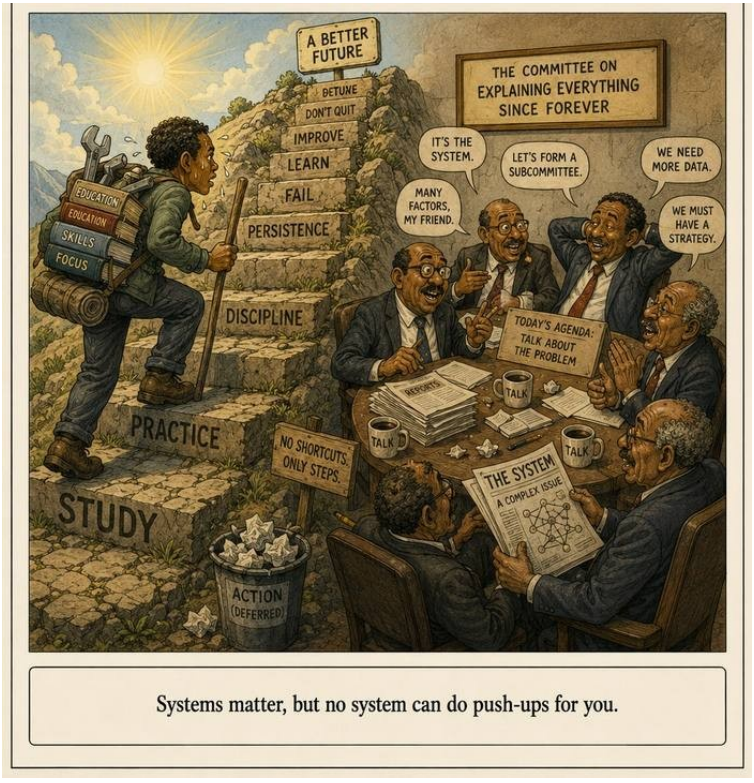
That brings us to a word that can sound moralistic but remains unavoidable: work. Hard work is not the whole explanation of national success, yet no institution can protect a society from work badly done.

REMEMBER *Sustainable wealth is not only what a country owns. It is what the country learns to do.*

CHAPTER 40

Hard Work Still Matters

Effort is not the whole answer, but no answer survives without it



It is fashionable to speak only about systems.

Systems matter enormously. A corrupt, violent, or incompetent system can waste the effort of excellent people. But the opposite mistake is to use the system as an explanation for every unfinished task.

A bad system can block your promotion. It cannot answer your email.

Poverty can limit your tools. It does not make punctuality impossible in every situation. Politics can damage opportunity. It does not force you to submit careless work when careful work was within reach.

Personal responsibility is not an insult to structural analysis. Both can be true.

The farmer needs fair markets and also disciplined work. The student needs a good school and also study. The civil servant needs clear rules and also honesty. The researcher needs funding and also patience. The entrepreneur needs infrastructure and also customer service.

Some people wait for Ethiopia to improve before improving anything they personally control. They say, “When the system changes, I will become serious.”

The system may be waiting for the same appointment. Hard work alone does not guarantee success. People can work brutally hard and remain poor because the economy, law, geography, health, or discrimination blocks them. We should never use work ethic to blame victims.

But no development strategy can succeed if responsibility disappears from the individual.

The goal is a fair system that rewards effort — and citizens prepared to make use of that fairness.

Young Ethiopian, control what you can. Learn deeply. Finish. Arrive. Reply. Practice. Keep records. Improve. Help someone behind you.

National culture is built partly from the standards people maintain when nobody important is watching.

It is unfair to tell a person working twelve hours under poor conditions that Ethiopia’s problem is laziness.

Many Ethiopians work extremely hard. Farmers labor under weather uncertainty. Women carry paid and unpaid work. Small traders survive unstable markets. Drivers, nurses, teachers, construction workers, and migrants endure long

hours. The national problem is often not the absence of effort. It is the low return to effort.

Young Ethiopian, hard work becomes productive when it meets tools, knowledge, organization, capital, infrastructure, and fair rules. A farmer using weak seed, unreliable rain, and poor roads may work harder than a mechanized farmer and produce less. The moral difference is not effort. It is system.

Still, systems cannot replace personal responsibility. A well-designed office fails if employees do not show up. A school with resources fails if teaching is careless. A business with investment fails if quality is ignored. A country can explain every delay through structural causes and still lose another year.

The useful position rejects both extremes.

Do not blame the poor for conditions they did not create. Do not use conditions as permission for work without standards. Hard work should include preparation, accuracy, completion, maintenance, and willingness to improve. Being busy is not the same as being productive. A meeting can consume eight people for three hours and produce one sentence confirming that another meeting is needed.

Measure output.

What changed because the work occurred?

Time discipline matters. So does rest. Overwork produces errors, illness, and resentment. The goal is not permanent exhaustion. It is focused, honest effort within systems that respect human life. Young Ethiopians also need permission to pursue mastery. Social pressure may reward quick status over long apprenticeship. A person wants the title before the skill, the business before the bookkeeping, the leadership before the service.

One Person Can Break a Wall

Never underestimate what one person's excellence can do to a closed gate.

In the early years of MTV, Black musicians were seriously underrepresented. Michael Jackson was not the first Black artist ever shown on the channel, and the barrier was not literally absolute. But the success of 'Billie Jean,' 'Beat It,' and then 'Thriller' in 1983 became a major turning point.

A Library of Congress essay on 'Thriller' describes early-1980s radio as heavily segregated by racialized genres and MTV as strongly oriented toward rock, which was commonly marketed as white. Jackson's music and videos became too powerful, popular, and category-defying for those boundaries to hold. His achievement did not end racism. No individual should have to become globally extraordinary merely to receive fair access. Institutions still carry a duty to remove unjust barriers. But the example teaches something useful: excellence can make exclusion expensive. When millions of people demand the work, a gatekeeper who ignores it begins damaging the gatekeeper's own institution.

Young Ethiopian, do not spend all your energy asking the world to recognize Ethiopia. Build something Ethiopian that the world cannot afford to ignore.

It might be a scientist, athlete, engineer, writer, entrepreneur, musician, medicine, technology, discovery, company, or university. Sometimes a national reputation changes through millions of quiet improvements. Sometimes one extraordinary person makes the first crack in the wall. The goal is not celebrity. It is mastery so useful, honest, and excellent that it opens space for those who follow.

Excellence does not replace justice, but excellence can force a closed institution to confront the cost of exclusion.

Mastery is quieter.

It requires repeating a task, accepting correction, reading beyond the examination, learning from failure, and doing invisible work before visible success.

Public culture should honor craftsmanship. The mechanic who diagnoses accurately, the tailor whose work lasts, the teacher whose students understand, and the programmer whose system remains usable are national assets.

Work ethic also applies to leaders. A speech is not work completed. A policy must be designed, funded, implemented, measured, corrected, and maintained. Announcing a target creates responsibility, not achievement.

Young Ethiopian, work hard — but also ask whether the system allows work to matter. Then help build that system. The next chapter explains why good systems do not make character unnecessary. They make good behavior easier, visible, and worth sustaining.

REMEMBER *Do not blame the poor for structural failure, and do not use structure as permission for careless work.*

CHAPTER 41

Good Systems Bring Out Good People

Good people need systems that make honesty useful

We often describe national problems as moral problems.

“People are corrupt.”

“People are selfish.”

“People do not care.”

Sometimes this is true. Character matters. But systems also teach behavior.

Put a decent person in an office with unclear rules, low pay, no supervision, political pressure, and complete control over a scarce service. Then act surprised when the office develops a market. Put an average person in a system with transparent procedures, digital records, audits, appeals, professional pride, and real consequences. Service often improves.

A good system does not assume everybody is a saint. It makes honest behavior easier, dishonest behavior harder, and performance visible.

A bad system does the opposite. It punishes the person who follows rules, rewards the person with connections, and teaches citizens that obedience without a relationship is foolish.

This is why leadership should focus less on speeches about morality and more on institutional design. Publish requirements. Reduce unnecessary discretion. Separate powers. Track decisions. Protect whistleblowers. Pay people adequately. Rotate sensitive roles. Enforce consequences without political favoritism.

Do not build a nation that requires an angel at every desk. Angels are difficult to recruit, and the civil-service examination has not been standardized.

Build systems in which ordinary imperfect human beings can do decent work reliably.

Then cultivate character too.

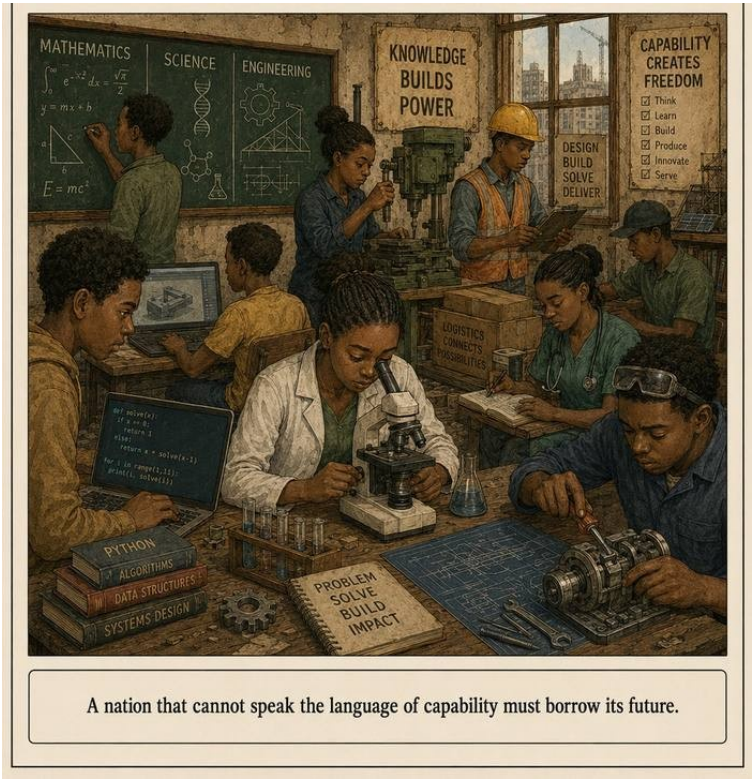
The strongest country combines good people with structures that help goodness survive pressure.

REMEMBER *Good people do not fix bad systems by being good. Good systems make honesty useful.*

CHAPTER 42

The Modern Language Is Productive Power

The modern language is productive capability



Every civilization has languages of identity, memory, worship, family, poetry, and daily life. Ethiopia’s languages are treasures. But the modern world also speaks languages of power. Mathematics. Science. Engineering. Coding. Medicine. Statistics. Standards. Law. Finance. Logistics. Contracts. Diplomacy. Manufacturing. Maintenance.

A nation that cannot speak these languages must buy decisions from nations that can.

This does not mean replacing Amharic, Afaan Oromo, Tigrinya, Somali, Afar, or any other Ethiopian language with English. It means making every Ethiopian language capable of carrying modern knowledge — and ensuring young people can also communicate internationally where needed.

A slogan can fill a stadium.

An equation can power a grid.

A patriotic speech can celebrate a dam. Engineering determines whether it holds.

A minister can announce digital transformation. A programmer must make the system work when ten thousand citizens log in. The language of power is precise. It asks: How much? By when? According to which standard? Who is responsible? What evidence? What happens if the assumption fails?

Politics often prefers vague words because vague words cannot be audited.

Development prefers numbers because the bridge has a load limit whether the speech is inspiring or not.

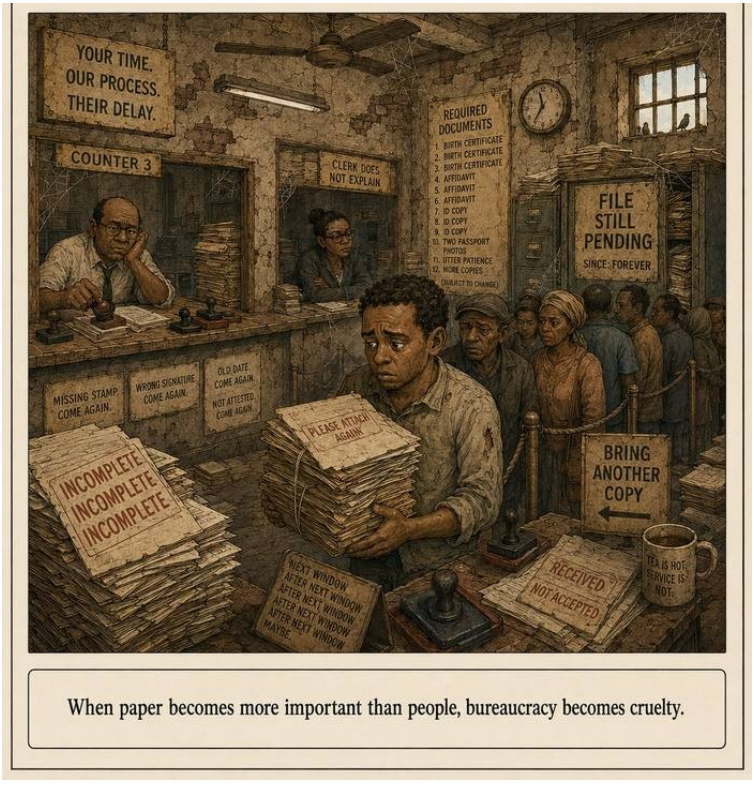
Young Ethiopians should become multilingual in the deepest sense: rooted in culture, able to speak with neighbors, and fluent in the technical languages that shape the century. The future will not belong only to those who know facts. It will belong to those who can learn, build, test, cooperate, and explain.

REMEMBER *The modern language is not English or code. It is the ability to make things work reliably.*

CHAPTER 43

The Office Where Paper Goes to Die

Bureaucracy becomes cruelty when the citizen must prove the same fact forever



Every country has offices. Some process paper. Others provide a peaceful resting place for paper after a long and difficult life.

The citizen arrives with a form. The form requires a signature. The official who signs is absent. The secretary explains that he is in a meeting about improving public

access. The citizen returns tomorrow. Tomorrow the office requests a copy of the document the office issued yesterday.

“Why?” asks the citizen.

“For the file.”

“Where is the file?”

“It is missing. That is why we need the copy.”

This is funny until the citizen needs medicine, land documentation, a school certificate, a business license, a pension, a court record, or permission connected to livelihood. Delay then becomes material harm.

Poor people pay the highest price. A professional takes a day off; a daily laborer loses income. A connected person calls an official; an ordinary person joins the line. A wealthy applicant hires an agent; a rural applicant sleeps near the office. Bureaucratic inconvenience is inequality wearing a stamp.

Young Ethiopian, the answer is not simply digitization. A bad process placed on a screen becomes a bad digital process with a password problem. Technology can reduce corruption and delay, but only if requirements are simplified, records are reliable, systems communicate, staff are trained, and citizens without internet access are protected.

The first reform question is not “How can we computerize this form?” but “Why does this form exist?” Every requirement should have a lawful purpose. Every fee should be published. Every application should produce a receipt and a tracking number. Deadlines should be real. Records should not belong to one official’s drawer. This is how the state becomes predictable — and predictability is an economic asset. Uncertainty creates a market for connections: when the rule is unclear, the broker becomes valuable; when the deadline is unknown, the gift becomes persuasive.

Public servants also suffer inside bad systems. They face impossible workloads, outdated equipment, conflicting orders, political pressure, low pay, and citizens angry about rules the worker did not design. Reform should not turn every clerk into a villain. It should give staff clear responsibility, training, tools, supervision, and protection for refusing improper orders.

The citizen and civil servant are often standing on opposite sides of the same broken process.

A modern state should make lawful action easier than unlawful action. That sounds obvious. It is revolutionary. Imagine an office where the requirements are posted, the queue is fair, the record is found, and the citizen leaves without needing a relative. Nobody holds a rally. No minister cuts a ribbon. The service simply works. That is the quiet dignity of institutions. The paper does not need to die. It only needs to reach the correct desk before the citizen does.

Process mapping is not glamorous, but it transforms public life: follow the citizen’s journey from beginning to end; count visits, signatures, fees, and waiting time; combine steps; and include the people who do the work, because frontline employees know where the process breaks. A grand reform designed entirely from the top produces a more modern-looking obstacle.

Imagine the national gain if millions of citizens recovered even a few hours each year from unnecessary waiting. Administrative dignity is development.

We now turn from what Ethiopia must build to what it must keep. Modernization should not require cultural amnesia. The question is how to add capability without subtracting identity. REMEMBER: A public office is successful when lawful service does not require friendship, humiliation, or an advanced degree in waiting.

INTERLUDE

A Short Scientific Paper

From the Journal of Applied Political Physics, Volume 1, Issue Only.

Abstract. We report the first quantitative measurement of the Convoy Constant (k), defined as the number of official vehicles required to move one leader one kilometer past one ordinary citizen. Field observations across our fictional republic yield k = 27 ± 4, rising sharply near cameras.

Method. Observers stood at the roadside for eleven hours holding a loaf of bread. The bread was weighed before and after. It lost value at 14 percent per hour, a rate we term Announcement Decay.

Results. We derive the fundamental relation: Distance from Ordinary Life = (Number of Vehicles) × (Length of Title) ÷ (Number of Results). Since Results approaches zero in the tested environment, Distance approaches infinity, which is consistent with the leader’s helicopter.

We further observe that the Chair Volume (V) is inversely proportional to Inner Security (S): V = 1/S. As S → 0, V → ∞; the office is enlarged, the door widened, and eventually the citizen must speak across a small agricultural zone. This is known as Chairman’s Law.

Discussion. Critics have suggested that our sample size is small. We reply that our sample was the entire country, which we agree is small compared to the chair.

Conclusion. Power obeys the same physics in every climate. Only the paint on the convoy changes. Further research is needed, but the funding has been reallocated to a launch event.

Acknowledgements. The authors thank the Minister of Rain for the weather, which occurred without assistance.

Questions for Your Generation

Three questions to argue about before the next part.

1. Why can a country with rivers, land, and young people still be poor? Give a mechanism, not a slogan.

2. The book says good systems bring out good people. Give one example where a bad system made a good person behave badly.

3. Count the signatures required for one ordinary task in your town. Which three could be removed tomorrow?

PART VII

WHAT WE MUST KEEP

Modernization should enlarge Ethiopia, not erase it. Modernization is often presented as subtraction: less language, less faith, less culture, less memory. I reject that arithmetic. Ethiopia can add science, constitutional government, industry, digital capability, equal citizenship, and global learning while preserving what gives life meaning. But preservation is not repetition. A living tradition must also examine itself.

Modernity without amnesia

Ethiopia should become modern without becoming ashamed of itself. Faith, languages, community, art, memory, and dignity can live beside laboratories, factories, software, accountable government, and scientific education.

Power in the modern world has many dialects.

Military capacity matters. So do diplomacy, finance, technology, food security, energy, information, logistics, public health, research, and the credibility of institutions.

A country that cannot produce or procure essential goods under pressure is vulnerable even if its speeches are fearless.

Young Ethiopian, productive power begins with the ability to solve ordinary problems at scale.

Can the country generate reliable electricity?

Can it store and transport food?

Can laboratories test disease?

Can factories meet standards?

Can schools teach literacy and numeracy consistently? Can public data be trusted?

Can software systems continue when one contractor leaves? These capacities become sovereignty.

Technology should not be confused with buying devices. A country becomes technologically capable when people can understand, adapt, repair, design, and eventually improve systems. Importing is often necessary. Dependency becomes dangerous when learning never follows.

Research universities have a central role. They should produce knowledge relevant to Ethiopian conditions while participating in global science. Funding must be competitive and transparent. Academic freedom matters because evidence cannot serve the country if it must first receive political approval. The modern language also includes standards. A product that cannot meet safety, quality, and documentation requirements cannot enter many markets. Standards may appear bureaucratic. They are often the grammar of trust.

Logistics is another hidden form of power. A farmer may produce excellent goods, but delays, poor storage, damaged roads, customs uncertainty, and fragmented transport destroy value. National ambition must travel through warehouses.

Digital systems create opportunities and risks. Ethiopia can expand finance, education, health, and government services through technology. It must also protect privacy, cybersecurity, access, and freedom from arbitrary surveillance.

Young people should learn not only to use platforms but to build and govern them.

Language in the literal sense matters as well. English and other international languages provide access to knowledge and markets. Ethiopian languages carry identity, local knowledge, and democratic participation. Modernization should strengthen both. Translation is infrastructure.

The modern language of power is ultimately competence. A country is heard differently when it can feed its people, educate its children, manage conflict, honor contracts, produce knowledge, and contribute something others need.

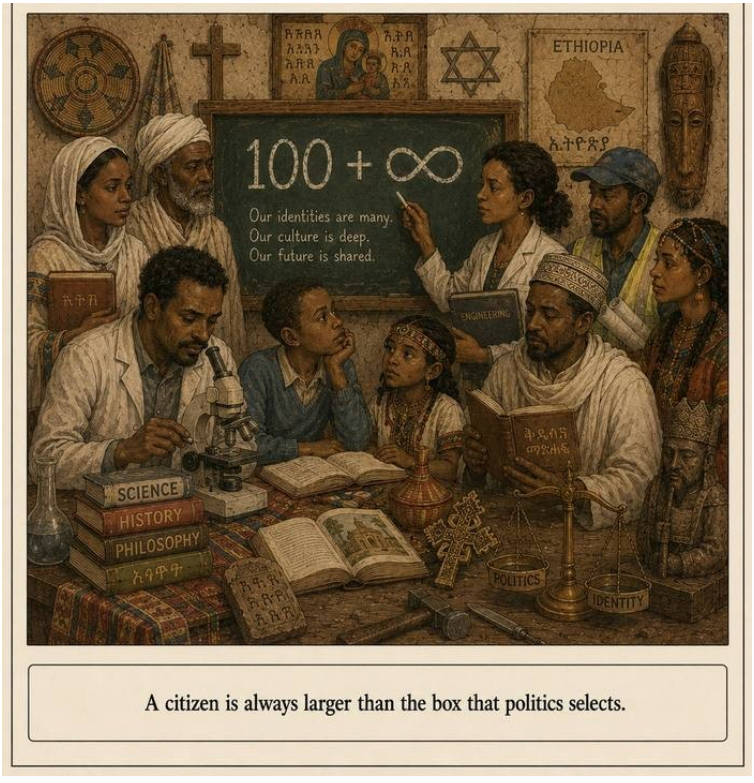
Historical dignity then enters the room accompanied by present evidence.

Our next chapter returns from national capability to a painfully familiar obstacle: the office where paper goes to die. REMEMBER: Modern sovereignty is the capacity to solve ordinary problems reliably at scale.

CHAPTER 44

One Hundred Plus Infinity

Modern knowledge should multiply culture, not subtract it



Ethiopia contains many peoples, languages, histories, regions, and identities.

Politicians like categories because categories fit on forms. Human beings are less cooperative.

A person may belong to a language, religion, town, profession, family, neighborhood, generation, and national story at the same time. Identity is not one box. It is one hundred plus infinity. The danger begins when political entrepreneurs reduce a citizen to the category most useful

for mobilization. They count people like beans and then act surprised when the stew burns. One group is told it owns the past. Another is told it owns the grievance. A third is told it must fear both. Every historical wound receives a microphone; every shared life becomes suspicious. Ethiopia is not one color. It is also not a sack of permanent enemies.

Think of injera. Its surface contains many bubbles. Nobody demands that every bubble become the same bubble before calling it one bread.

Unity does not require sameness. Diversity does not require political war.

A modern constitutional culture should protect language, culture, local self-government, equal citizenship, mobility, and individual rights. No person should lose protection because he lives outside the region associated with his identity. No child should inherit an enemy by birth.

We must be honest about injustice without turning injustice into a hereditary profession.

Young Ethiopians should refuse two lies: that Ethiopia can survive only by erasing differences, and that differences can survive only by weakening Ethiopia.

The task is harder and better: build a country large enough for many identities and strong enough to protect the individual inside every group.

The phrase “one hundred plus infinity” is a way of rejecting a false choice.

Modern knowledge does not require us to subtract Ethiopian culture until nothing recognizable remains. Scientific capability, digital systems, industrial skill, constitutional government, and global communication can be added to language, faith, music, family memory, hospitality, art, and local knowledge. The operation should be addition.

Even Our Alphabets Become Political

Even our alphabets can become political battlefields. Ethiopia possesses one of the world's old written traditions. The Ge'ez-derived script is an extraordinary cultural inheritance and continues to serve several Ethiopian languages. It should be preserved, studied, digitized, taught, and used confidently in the modern world.

But several Ethiopian languages use Latin-based scripts for historical, linguistic, educational, and practical reasons. That does not make those languages or their speakers less Ethiopian. The better question is not, 'Which alphabet proves who belongs?' It is, 'Does our language policy help people learn, communicate, preserve heritage, and participate fully in modern life?'

An alphabet is a tool. It should not become another weapon. At the same time, do not treat an inherited script as useless merely because something foreign appears modern. Modernize it. Develop fonts and keyboards. Build spell-checkers, search tools, educational software, speech systems, scientific vocabulary, and artificial-intelligence resources. Publish children's books, research, journalism, literature, and technical manuals in it.

The correct response to heritage is neither blind worship nor blind rejection. It is development.

A language becomes stronger when it can carry both memory and new knowledge.

Use script to carry knowledge, not to measure the Ethiopian identity of another citizen.

Young Ethiopian, cultures are not museum objects. They change because people live. The question is not whether change occurs but whether people participate in shaping it.

A language survives when it can carry new thought. It needs literature, science vocabulary, software, children's books, journalism, film, scholarship, and daily use. Protecting a language by keeping it away from modern

subjects is another way of weakening it. Traditional knowledge also deserves serious study. Farmers understand soils, seasons, plants, and animals. Communities hold practices of conflict resolution, mutual support, architecture, food preservation, and environmental adaptation. Some practices are valuable. Others may contain inequality, exclusion, or error. Respect does not require romantic acceptance of everything old.

Science should examine tradition without contempt. Tradition should meet evidence without fear.

The same balance applies to family and community. Ethiopian social life can provide belonging and mutual aid. It can also become intrusive, hierarchical, or hostile to individual choice. Modernity should not destroy community. It should widen dignity inside it. Young people should be free to choose education, profession, marriage, and belief within law and respect for others. Elders should be honored without being given ownership of every future decision. Women should not be praised as the strength of the family while denied equal power over their own lives.

Culture is strongest when it can correct itself.

The diaspora adds another dimension. Children raised abroad may speak imperfectly, combine identities, and ask questions that make elders uncomfortable. Do not treat them as cultural failures. Invite them into a living relationship. Teach language with affection, history with honesty, and tradition without fear. A culture maintained only through guilt will not survive generously.

Ethiopia also contains many cultures. National identity should not flatten them into one approved costume. Unity can be built from equal belonging, shared institutions, and curiosity about one another.

The “plus infinity” is the capacity to learn endlessly. We can add engineering without subtracting poetry, constitutional law without subtracting community, and modern medicine without insulting every traditional insight.

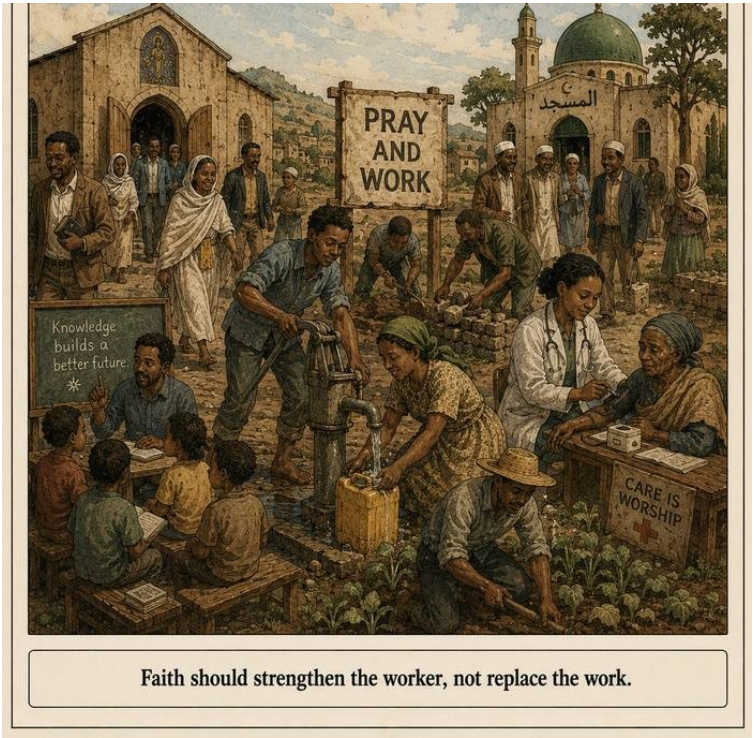
The next chapter turns to faith, one of the deepest sources of Ethiopian identity and also one of the easiest subjects to use as an excuse for waiting.

REMEMBER *Modern knowledge should multiply culture, not subtract it.*

CHAPTER 45

We Have God Too

Faith should produce responsibility, not an excuse to wait


PRAY AND WORK
المسجد
Knowledge builds a better future.
CARE IS WORSHIP
Faith should strengthen the worker, not replace the work.

Ethiopia is a country of deep faith.

Church bells, calls to prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, scripture, charity, and religious memory shape daily life. This spiritual inheritance should not be treated as an obstacle to modernity. But faith should not become an excuse for avoiding responsibility. God is not a subcontractor for work the ministry forgot to finish. Prayer can strengthen a farmer. It does not repair the irrigation pump by itself. Faith can guide a doctor. It does not replace diagnosis. A blessing can accompany a bridge. Engineering must still calculate the load.

To say this is not disrespectful. If God gave human beings minds, refusing to use them is not humility.

Religious life can support honesty, service, compassion, restraint, forgiveness, and the belief that power is temporary. These are exactly the qualities public life needs.

The problem is not faith. The problem is hypocrisy: leaders who display religion while practicing cruelty, citizens who pray against corruption and then offer a small gift to move their own file, believers who speak of love while inheriting hatred. A modern Ethiopia can contain strong faith and strong science. The church bell and the laboratory alarm can ring on the same morning. A person can pray before beginning careful work and then take full responsibility for the quality of that work. We have God too.

Therefore, we have fewer excuses for treating one another without dignity.

Faith has carried Ethiopians through war, poverty, illness, displacement, and grief.

It has created churches, mosques, scholarship, music, charity, discipline, fasting, community, and moral language. For many people, it gives life meaning that politics and economics cannot provide.

This book does not ask Ethiopia to become less faithful. It asks faith to become more responsible.

Young Ethiopian, prayer is not the opposite of work. In the strongest traditions, prayer disciplines the person for work, honesty, humility, and service. The danger begins when divine language becomes a substitute for human duty.

A road is unsafe. “God will protect us.”

A patient needs medical care. “Let us wait for a miracle.”

A corrupt official steals. “God will judge him,” says the person who has the evidence and the lawful duty to act.

God may judge. The auditor should also arrive.

Religious institutions possess enormous social power. They can teach the equal worth of human beings, protect the vulnerable, mediate conflict, reject collective hatred, support education, and care for the poor. They can also bless power, repeat ethnic suspicion, hide abuse, or treat questions as disobedience.

Faith must choose.

The moral authority of a religious leader should be measured by willingness to speak truth to his own community, not only to its opponents. Condemning another group's violence is easy. Naming wrongdoing among supporters is courage.

Science and faith should not be forced into a childish war. Science asks how the natural world behaves through evidence and testable explanation. Faith addresses meaning, worship, moral commitment, and ultimate questions in different ways. Conflict arises when either is used outside its competence or when institutions fear losing authority.

Young Ethiopians need excellent science education and freedom of conscience. A medical treatment should be evaluated by evidence. A religious person can still receive it with gratitude. A scientist can recognize that technical knowledge does not answer every moral question.

Faith also shapes time. Fasting, prayer, holy days, and communal practice can create discipline and identity. Workplaces and schools should respect religion without allowing religion to become a tool for discrimination.

In conflict, religious language can either humanize or mobilize. A sermon can prevent revenge. It can also make revenge sound sacred. The responsibility is enormous.

Young Ethiopian, do not use God as a reason to surrender your agency. If you pray for a better country, let the prayer change how you work, vote, speak, study, pay, hire, and treat the person outside your group.

We have God too.

Therefore, we have even less excuse to humiliate one another. The next chapter rejects another false choice: learning from Germany, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, or America does not mean becoming any of them.

REMEMBER *If faith is sincere, it should make responsibility stronger, not waiting easier.*

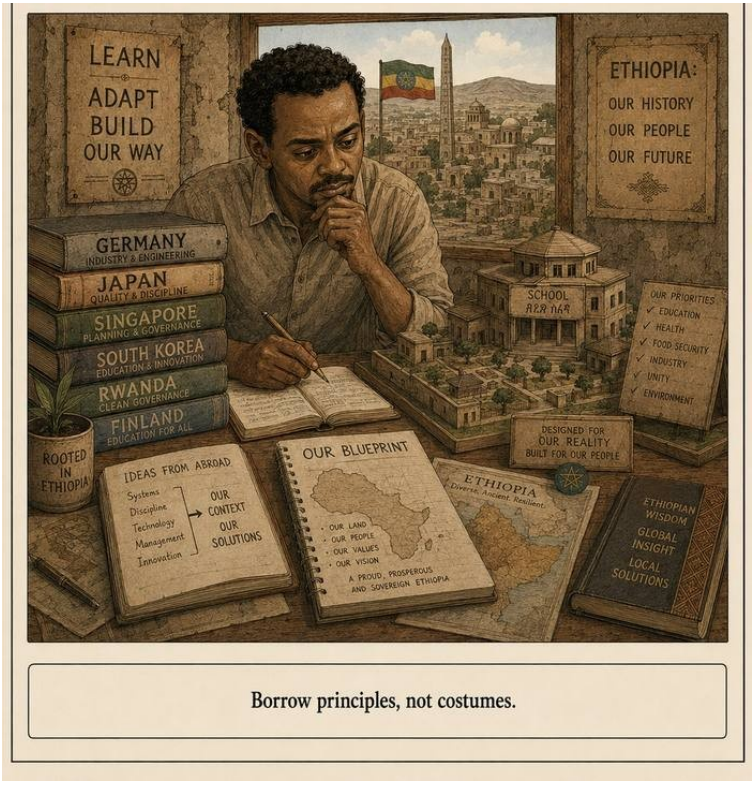
LETTER PAUSE

Faith becomes public responsibility when prayer changes how we work, judge, forgive, and protect the vulnerable.

CHAPTER 46

Do Not Become Germany or Japan

A country can learn from the world without becoming a copy



I have written admiringly about lessons from Germany, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and the United States.

Now let me be clear: do not become them.

Learn from them. Study what works. Adapt institutions, technologies, training systems, and habits of quality. But

Ethiopia should not become a poor imitation of somebody else's success.

Copying a suit does not import the person inside it. Importing a machine does not import the culture of maintenance. Translating a law does not automatically create the trust that made the law work elsewhere.

Every system lives inside history, geography, culture, and social relationships. What succeeds in one country must be adapted honestly to another.

We should import knowledge without importing inferiority. Do not assume foreign means modern and local means backward. Some local practices contain wisdom about community, climate, conflict resolution, food, health, art, and survival. Some foreign practices are simply foreign mistakes with better packaging. The goal is selection. Keep what strengthens dignity, productivity, justice, learning, and peace. Reject what weakens them, regardless of whether it arrived from abroad or from an ancestor. Young Ethiopians should be confident enough to learn without kneeling and humble enough to admit when another society solved a problem better.

That balance is maturity.

Copying is attractive because it appears faster than learning. A country sees a successful institution elsewhere and imports the visible form: a technology park, a development bank, a research council, an industrial zone, a federal arrangement, a school model, a digital platform, or a constitutional phrase.

The name arrives immediately. The function does not. Young Ethiopian, institutions are ecosystems. A model that works in one society depends on history, law, skills, finance, culture, trust, and surrounding organizations. Copying the surface can create expensive theater.

Learning is harder. It asks which problem the institution solved, what conditions allowed it to work, which incentives sustained it, what failures appeared, and how the principle

can be adapted locally. Japan's quality systems cannot be separated from firm organization and worker training. Germany's apprenticeships depend on cooperation among employers, schools, chambers, and standards. Korea's industrial development involved state capacity, firms, education, exports, and historical conditions. America's innovation system includes universities, capital, immigration, markets, and tolerance for failure.

Ethiopia should borrow principles, not costumes.

This requires experimentation. Pilot a reform. Measure results. Listen to users. Scale what works. Correct what fails. Political leaders often dislike pilots because uncertainty produces a smaller ceremony. But responsible learning begins with the possibility that the first design is wrong.

Local knowledge is essential. A policy made in Addis Ababa may fail in a pastoral area, a border town, a highland farming community, or a rapidly growing regional city because conditions differ. Adaptation is not disobedience. It is governance.

Young Ethiopian, resist both inferiority and exceptionalism.

Inferiority says, "Foreign people are capable; we must copy them."

Exceptionalism says, "Ethiopia is unique; no outside lesson applies."

Both positions prevent learning.

Human societies face recurring problems: educating children, limiting power, coordinating infrastructure, managing diversity, creating work, protecting health, resolving disputes, and preserving trust. Context changes the solution, but experience remains useful. Cultural confidence makes learning easier. A person secure in identity can admit that another society does something better. He does not experience knowledge as conquest.

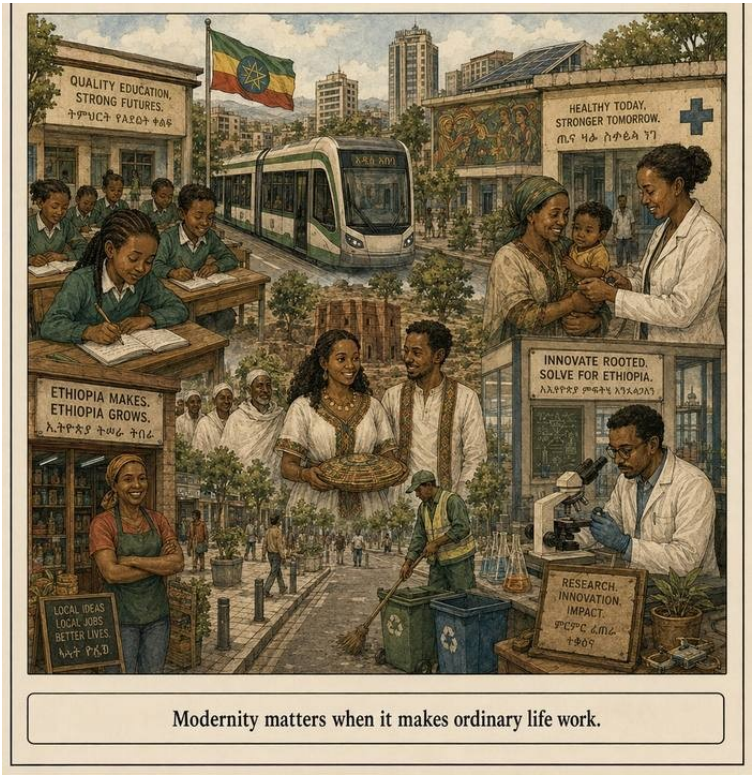
The goal is not to make Addis Ababa look like Tokyo, Berlin, Seoul, Taipei, or Los Angeles. The goal is to build Ethiopian cities that work: transport, housing, sanitation, public space, heritage, business, safety, and dignity shaped for local life. The next chapter describes that destination directly: a modern Ethiopia, not a copy and not a museum.

REMEMBER *Borrow principles, test them locally, and refuse both inferiority and exceptionalism.*

CHAPTER 47

Become a Modern Ethiopia

Modern Ethiopia should be more Ethiopian because it is more capable


QUALITY EDUCATION. STRONG FUTURES.
ትምህርት የልደት ቀልቀ
HEALTHY TODAY. STRONGER TOMORROW.
ጠና ዛሬ ስሞይሓ ነገ
INNOVATE ROOTED. SOLVE FOR ETHIOPIA.
ኢኒየየጵያ ምፍትኒ ኣንፈልግን
ETHIOPIA MAKES. ETHIOPIA GROWS.
ኢትዮጵያ ትሠራ ተበራ
LOCAL IDEAS LOCAL JOBS BETTER LIVES
ሓሓተ ዮሲD
RESEARCH. INNOVATION. IMPACT.
ምርምር ፈጠራ ተቋዕና
Modernity matters when it makes ordinary life work.

Modernity is not a costume.

It is not a glass building, imported car, English sign, or conference with the word innovation printed very large behind the speakers.

A modern country uses knowledge to improve life. It makes law predictable, education serious, health accessible, work productive, public information reliable, and disagreement survivable. A modern Ethiopia can preserve faith, family,

hospitality, music, food, languages, neighborhood ties, and respect for elders while rejecting corruption, fatalism, political worship, and inherited hatred.

Wi-Fi and wisdom can share the same roof.

A rural school can teach local history and robotics. A farmer can use ancestral knowledge and satellite weather information. A church or mosque can serve the poor while encouraging science and education. A city can build modern transport without treating residents as disposable.

Modernity should reach the village clinic, the court file, the farm cooperative, the public toilet, the research laboratory, and the small business — not only the government presentation.

Do Not Destroy Your Own House to Look Modern

Poor countries sometimes make a second mistake: they assume modernization means importing everything and distrusting whatever was already at home.

Foreign clothes, foreign language, foreign architecture, foreign political theory, foreign educational systems, foreign technology — all can appear modern simply because they arrived from somewhere else.

There is nothing wrong with learning from abroad. Much of my professional life depended on it. But learning is not the same as erasing yourself.

Japan learned from Western science and industry without deciding Japanese culture was useless. Korea built modern technological capacity without abandoning the Korean language. Germany participates in a global economy without replacing German whenever a machine becomes advanced. Ethiopia should learn aggressively. Import methods, tools, standards, evidence, and technology. Then adapt them, improve them, and make them serve Ethiopian lives.

Take what works from the world, but do not throw away something valuable merely because it is yours.

Do not destroy your own house to prove that you have learned how another country builds.

Modernity should enlarge Ethiopia, not replace it with an imitation.

The test is ordinary life.

Can the citizen obtain a document without begging? Can the child learn? Can the woman travel safely? Can the farmer store a crop? Can the young person disagree without becoming an enemy? Can a leader leave office alive and ordinary?

Become modern in systems and confident in identity.

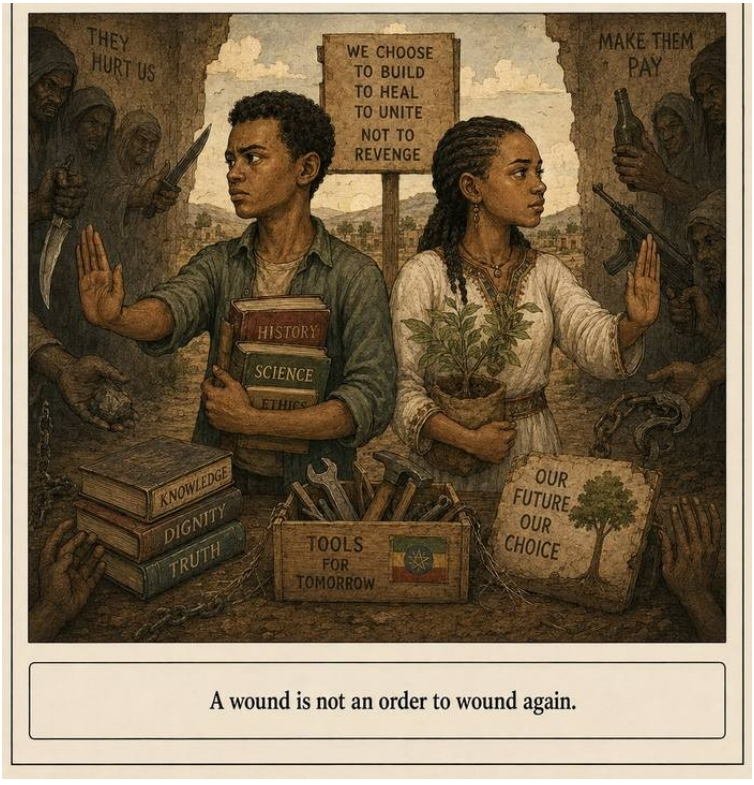
Build an Ethiopia that does not need to choose between memory and the future.

REMEMBER *Become modern in systems and confident in identity — not the reverse.*

CHAPTER 48

Refuse to Inherit Our Hatred

You may inherit a wound without inheriting the duty to wound someone else Young Ethiopian, every family has history.



Young Ethiopian, every family has history.

Some histories contain loss, displacement, imprisonment, confiscated land, insult, discrimination, political betrayal, or death. Some wounds are recent. Some travelled through grandparents and arrived in children who never met the person at the beginning of the story.

You should listen to these histories.

Do not tell a wounded person to forget. Forgetting is not reconciliation. Silence does not heal memory; it often makes memory more powerful and less accurate.

But listening creates a responsibility.

The pain must not automatically become an instruction to hate everybody who shares a language, region, religion, political label, or ancestry with the person who caused it.

Collective guilt is emotionally efficient and morally destructive. It allows a complicated event to become a simple enemy. It also guarantees an endless supply of innocent targets.

One generation says, “They did this to us.”

The next says, “We must protect ourselves.”

A politician says, “Only I can protect you.”

A young person is given a weapon and a story with all the uncertainty removed.

Then another family receives a wound.

This is how history becomes a factory.

Refusing inherited hatred does not mean pretending every group has suffered equally in every period. It does not mean avoiding accountability. It does not mean demanding that victims become emotionally convenient.

It means refusing to transfer guilt by category. The individual who committed a crime should answer through law. The official who ordered abuse should be investigated. The institution that discriminated should be reformed. The victim should be recognized. Records should be preserved. Property claims and reparations may require serious processes.

But the child of a perpetrator is not born convicted. The neighbor who shares a name is not evidence.

The citizen who rejects your political interpretation does not automatically reject your humanity.

Young people are especially vulnerable to leaders who package identity as emergency. The message is always urgent: Your group is disappearing.

The others are united against you.

Moderation is betrayal.

Questions help the enemy.

Violence is regrettable but necessary.

Send money now.

The leader may then live safely while the young carry the consequences.

Before joining an ethnic, national, religious, or political campaign, ask what future it offers after fear. Does it protect equal citizenship? Can it criticize crimes committed by its own side? Does it allow internal disagreement? Does it need permanent enemies to maintain unity?

A movement that cannot survive without hatred will manufacture hatred when peace arrives.

Ethiopia needs memory, but memory must become law and learning rather than recruitment.

Schools should teach history with evidence and multiple perspectives. Archives should be protected. Museums and memorials should humanize victims rather than convert them into ammunition. Public language should distinguish between responsibility and ancestry.

Religious traditions can help by insisting on the moral equality of human beings, repentance, truth, forgiveness where possible, and justice without revenge. They can also worsen conflict if leaders bless collective suspicion. Faith must choose its role. The diaspora has a special responsibility. Distance can make political language reckless. A person with safety, salary, and citizenship abroad may encourage confrontation for relatives who will remain near the fire. Patriotism should never be measured

by how loudly one recommends sacrifice for somebody else’s child. You may inherit a wound.

Honor it by preventing another wound, not by searching for a new body on which to place it.

The generation before you could not resolve every historical argument. Yours may not either. But you can change the rule by which disagreement becomes identity and identity becomes war. Begin with a simple civic promise: No Ethiopian must prove another Ethiopian’s innocence before receiving equal rights.

REMEMBER *You may inherit a painful memory, but you do not inherit a moral duty to create a new victim.*

LETTER PAUSE

You may inherit a wound. Honor it by preventing another wound, not by searching for a new body.

Questions for Your Generation

Three questions to argue about before the next part.

1. What should Ethiopia keep while becoming modern? What must it be willing to change?

2. The book says a peace treaty cannot grow back a leg. What does that mean for how conflicts should be prevented, not only ended?

3. Write one sentence you would want the next generation to read about yours.

PART VIII

THE LETTER

The final pages turn from diagnosis to responsibility: what your generation can build, refuse, repair, and leave standing.

The final part turns toward you. Diagnosis without responsibility becomes another form of entertainment. What country should you build? Can you lose without destroying the rules? Can you leave a ladder behind? Can those abroad come home in more than one way? The letter ends where it began with love strong enough to ask for work.

What I hope your generation will build

The final part is not a prediction. It is an invitation: build a country where public office is temporary, ordinary work is respected, peace is protected, knowledge accumulates, and the next generation begins farther along the road.

A modern Ethiopia should not be defined only by tall buildings. A building can be modern in appearance and premodern in its relationship to law. A digital service can reproduce old favoritism. A new road can serve an old system of exclusion.

Modernity is not glass. It is capability, dignity, evidence, and institutions that can correct themselves.

Young Ethiopian, imagine modernity in ordinary terms.

A child in a rural school receives excellent teaching and internet access without abandoning language or community.

A farmer has secure use rights, weather information, irrigation, storage, insurance, and a market.

A patient can receive diagnosis without selling the family future. A woman can travel, work, lead, inherit, and live free from violence.

A citizen can criticize government without becoming a security problem.

A business can follow clear rules without a political sponsor. A police officer protects an opponent’s meeting because the law belongs to everyone.

A university appoints by merit and allows evidence to embarrass policy.

A former leader walks home.

That is modernity.

Infrastructure matters. Ethiopia needs energy, transport, housing, water, sanitation, digital networks, laboratories, and productive industry. But infrastructure should connect human lives rather than merely display state ambition.

Environmental limits matter too. Climate change, land degradation, water stress, and urban pollution can erase development gains. Modernization must be ecologically intelligent. Renewable energy alone is not enough if watersheds are damaged and communities excluded from decisions.

Modern Ethiopia must also be multilingual and inclusive. Public services should communicate in languages people understand. National connection should be strengthened through translation, mobility, education, and equal citizenship rather than enforced cultural sameness.

The legal system must become predictable. Citizens and investors both need contracts, courts, records, and

protection from arbitrary power. This is not submission to foreign economic ideas. It is protection from the local strongman.

Young people should see public service as honorable, but public office should not be the main route to wealth. The economy must reward building, teaching, healing, designing, farming, researching, and creating.

A modern state also knows what it does not know. It collects data, consults experts, listens to communities, evaluates policy, and publishes failure. Secrecy should be exceptional, not the natural climate of administration.

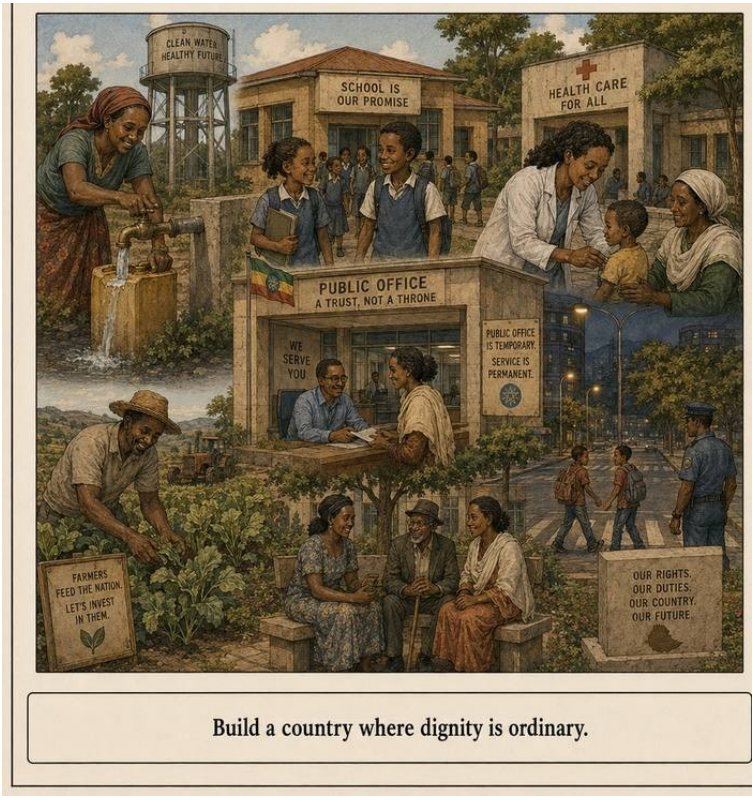
Young Ethiopian, modernization is not a rejection of ancestors. It is the fulfillment of responsibility toward descendants. Our ancestors used the tools and knowledge available to them. Honoring them does not mean freezing ourselves at their level. It means carrying their courage into problems they never faced. Before the final letter, one more inheritance must be refused: the hatred passed from one generation to another as though pain requires a new victim.

REMEMBER: Modern Ethiopia should be more capable and more fully itself.

CHAPTER 49

The Country I Want You to Build

A country where dignity is ordinary and public office is temporary


CLEAN WATER HEALTHY FUTURE
SCHOOL IS OUR PROMISE
HEALTH CARE FOR ALL
PUBLIC OFFICE
A TRUST, NOT A THRONE
WE SERVE YOU
PUBLIC OFFICE IS TEMPORARY. SERVICE IS PERMANENT.
FARMERS FEED THE NATION. LET'S INVEST IN THEM.
OUR RIGHTS. OUR DUTIES. OUR COUNTRY. OUR FUTURE.
Build a country where dignity is ordinary.

A country where the ordinary things work so well nobody makes a speech about them I want you to build a country where electricity is not a surprise. Where water arrives without a political slogan attached to the pipe.

Where a child can attend school without learning which classmate is supposed to be a historical enemy.

Where a farmer can plant without first checking whether politicians are preparing another war.

Where a business can sign a contract and believe a court will read it.

Where a public office answers the citizen before the citizen becomes an elder.

Where a police officer protects dignity rather than borrowing importance from fear.

Where a university values research, teaching, and mentorship more than the number of banners announcing excellence. Where an Ethiopian passport begins a journey instead of an interrogation.

Where a domestic worker, guard, driver, farmer, nurse, mechanic, teacher, engineer, artist, and entrepreneur receive dignity because work matters.

Where no leader is too sacred to question and no citizen too small to protect.

Where religion makes people more honest and science makes policy more intelligent.

Where ethnicity is an identity, not a weapon issued at birth. Where former leaders live in ordinary houses, write selective memoirs, complain about traffic, and discover that the country continues without them.

This may sound ambitious. It is also made of ordinary things: rules, habits, training, maintenance, patience, courage, and thousands of people doing work that does not appear on television. A country is not built only by presidents. It is built by people who arrive before the president’s convoy and remain after it leaves. Do not wait for a national savior.

Build institutions that make saviors unnecessary. I want you to build a country where dignity is ordinary. Not a country waiting for one unusually kind official. Not a country where

the citizen celebrates because the clerk did not insult him. Dignity should be built into the process.

The country I want you to build is peaceful, but not silent. Stable, but not frozen. Proud, but not asleep. Religious, but not irresponsible. Diverse, but not partitioned into permanent suspicion. Modern, but recognizably Ethiopian.

Young Ethiopian, this country will require choices that no inspirational sentence can settle.

Resources are limited. Regions have competing needs. Historical claims conflict. Development creates winners and losers. Security sometimes requires secrecy. Freedom can be abused. Markets can create wealth and inequality. Government can correct failure and create new failure.

Maturity means governing trade-offs honestly.

Do not promise every group everything. Explain priorities. Publish evidence. Admit cost. Create lawful ways to challenge decisions. Protect minorities from the excitement of the majority. The country I want you to build values competence without creating an educated aristocracy. Experts should advise, but citizens should decide through legitimate institutions. Technical language should clarify choices, not hide power.

It protects entrepreneurship without allowing wealth to purchase the state. It protects labor without making every firm impossible. It supports farmers without trapping them in low productivity. It welcomes investment without selling public interest in secret. It remembers victims without recruiting children into revenge. It teaches history as evidence, complexity, and human consequence. It allows regions and communities meaningful self-government while maintaining equal citizenship and shared national capacity. The exact constitutional design will continue to be debated. The nonnegotiable principle should be that no Ethiopian becomes a guest in Ethiopia.

The country I want you to build treats women as complete citizens, not symbols of culture or sacrifice. It protects

children from violence, hunger, preventable disease, and the theft of education. It measures leaders by what works after they leave. This country will not be built in one election. It will be built in offices, classrooms, farms, laboratories, courts, families, businesses, religious communities, media rooms, and political parties. You may never see the complete result.

Build anyway.

A civilization is a project whose beneficiaries include people not yet born.

The next chapter gives one of the simplest and hardest skills this country needs: learning to lose without destroying the rules. REMEMBER: A civilization is a project whose beneficiaries include people not yet born.

REMEMBER *The country worth building is one where public office is temporary and ordinary work is respected.*

CHAPTER 50

Learn to Lose

The sentence ‘I lost’ may be more revolutionary than the sentence ‘I will lead’

ELECTION RESULTS
CANDIDATE A 47%
CANDIDATE B 53%
"Democracy is not who wins, but how we accept the result."
DEMOCRACY WINS
I LOST.
I ACCEPT THE RESULT.
OUR NATION IS BIGGER THAN ANY AMBITION.
POWER IS TEMPORARY DIGNITY IS PERMANENT
CONSTITUTION
Learning to lose may be the first lesson in learning to govern.

Ethiopian politics contains many courageous people. It has fewer people trained in losing.

We know how to announce victory. We know how to explain that defeat was caused by fraud, foreign interference, disloyal colleagues, weather, historical forces, an incorrect microphone, or the temporary misunderstanding of the people.

The simple sentence is difficult: “I lost.”

Why?

Because losing has often been dangerous. A defeated ruler may face prison, exile, confiscation, humiliation, or death. A defeated faction may lose access to jobs, contracts, protection, and influence. A local official who loses position may lose identity.

Under these conditions, political competition becomes existential. The solution is not to preach sportsmanship while the winner takes everything.

The solution is to reduce the cost of losing.

Rights must remain after elections. Civil servants must not become party property. Courts must protect opponents. Businesses should not require political loyalty. Regions and communities must retain lawful voice. Former leaders should receive security without immunity for serious crimes. Political parties should survive defeat and try again.

When losing becomes survivable, winning becomes less violent. This lesson begins before national elections. It begins in a student association, a church committee, a professional society, a family business, a university department, a political movement, and the small rebel meeting from an earlier chapter.

Can you nominate yourself and congratulate the person selected instead?

Can you support a decision you argued against?

Can you leave a position without removing the files, furniture, password, and emotional oxygen from the office?

Can you teach your successor what you know?

Can you hear applause for another person without interpreting it as a reduction in your height?

These are democratic skills.

They are not produced automatically by a constitution. A country can hold elections and remain psychologically monarchical. Everybody wants the top chair. The loser does

not become opposition; he becomes a rival government waiting for a chance. The winner does not become temporary officeholder; he becomes the nation.

Young Ethiopian, practice losing in small places. Lose an argument and remain kind.

Lose a vote and remain useful.

Lose a job and remain yourself.

Lose a leadership position and help the institution continue. This is not weakness. It is proof that your value exists outside the chair.

The person who cannot lose is easy to control. Power only needs to threaten removal, and he will sacrifice principle to remain. The person who can leave has freedom.

Institutions should celebrate honorable exits. A retiring director should be thanked without being worshipped. An outgoing president should transfer authority publicly. A founder should introduce the next leader. A professor should make room for younger scholars. An elder should bless change without demanding ownership of it. Ethiopia's future depends on many people saying: "My service mattered, but the institution is not me." The culture of losing also changes debate. If defeat is temporary, compromise becomes possible. If every decision is final, every disagreement becomes war. Democracy assumes that today's majority may be tomorrow's minority and therefore should protect the rules it will later need.

This is why the rights of opponents are not generosity. They are insurance.

Learn to lose.

Then build a country in which losing does not mean disappearing. REMEMBER: Democracy becomes real when losing power no longer means losing dignity, safety, citizenship, or the right to try again.

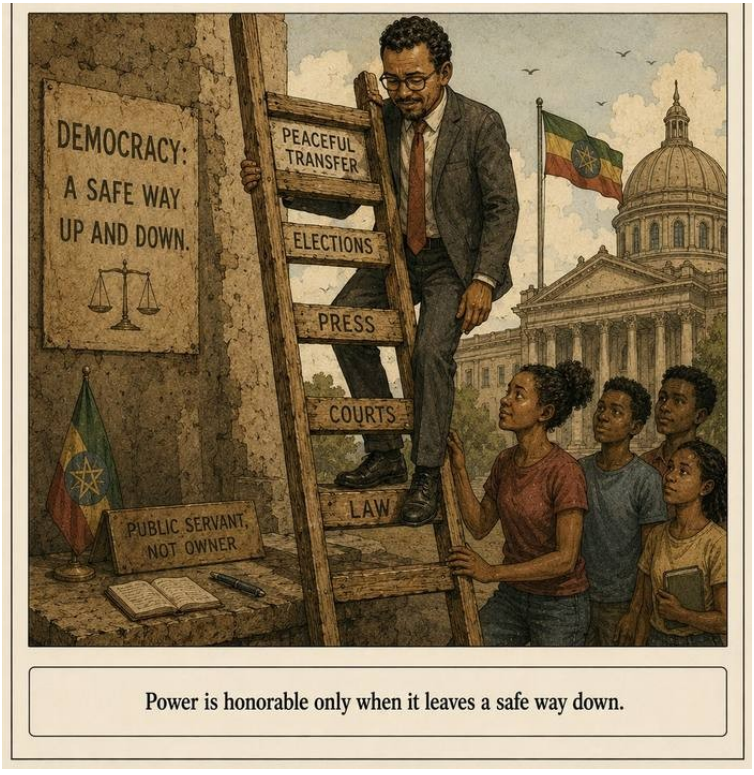
REMEMBER *A citizen who cannot lose cannot be trusted to*

win.

CHAPTER 51

Leave the Ladder Standing

Climb, build, then leave the next step intact



We return to the ladder.

A new leader climbs. Perhaps you support him. Perhaps you do not. The law must remain the same in both cases.

Do not remove the court step because the judge ruled against your party. Do not remove the press step because the journalist embarrassed your hero. Do not remove the opposition step because you are certain your side represents history.

History has met many people who were certain.

The ladder protects more than the next challenger. It protects the current leader by giving him a safe exit.

Peaceful transfer requires restraint from winners and losers. The winner must not treat victory as ownership of the country. The loser must not treat defeat as proof that violence is the only remaining vote.

Accountability should be lawful. Revenge should not be renamed justice. Crimes must be investigated, but political change must not become a hunt in which every former official expects prison and every new official expects immunity.

Term limits, independent courts, professional security institutions, honest elections, and a free press are parts of the same architecture: they make political life less fatal.

Young Ethiopians will be tempted to kick the ladder when a disliked person is climbing.

Do not.

The missing step will still be missing when it is your turn. Protect rules most strongly when they protect somebody you oppose. That is when a principle proves it is not merely a preference. Leave the ladder standing.

Repair it after every crisis.

And never allow one frightened man at the top to convince the country that the only alternative to his rule is falling. Leaving the ladder standing is more than allowing another politician to take office.

It means preserving every lawful path by which another person can learn, serve, challenge, organize, and advance.

A professor leaves the ladder by mentoring students. A business owner leaves it by training employees and refusing nepotism.

A parent leaves it by educating daughters and sons equally. An elder leaves it by allowing younger people to lead without demanding ritual dependence.

A diaspora professional leaves it by opening networks rather than guarding them as proof of superiority.

Young Ethiopian, every gatekeeper faces a choice. The gate can protect standards or protect status.

Standards are necessary. Not everyone is qualified for every role. Selection should be rigorous. But criteria must be clear, relevant, and applied fairly. A ladder with missing steps is not meritocracy. The political ladder requires elections, parties, media, courts, civil society, peaceful protest, and safe retirement. Each step supports the others. Remove independent courts and elections become less credible. Remove media and citizens cannot evaluate. Criminalize opposition and peaceful change disappears. Make retirement dangerous and rulers cling.

A leader may remove the ladder gradually, claiming each step is a temporary response to threat. The public notices only when there is no path left.

Protect the steps early.

The social ladder matters too. A child should not be permanently limited by birthplace, poverty, gender, ethnicity, disability, or family connections. Education, health, nutrition, and public safety determine whether talent can climb.

Economic mobility requires fair competition and access to capital. If every opportunity belongs to networks around power, frustration becomes political fuel.

Young Ethiopian, when you climb, remember who held the ladder. Family, teachers, taxpayers, workers, institutions, and luck contributed. Success is real; self-creation is usually a myth. Gratitude should become structure.

Fund a scholarship. Share knowledge. Recommend fairly. Pay taxes honestly. Build an organization that survives you. Do not require people behind you to repeat every humiliation you endured. Some leaders defend bad systems

by saying, “I suffered too.” Suffering is not a tradition that must be preserved. Leave the next step intact.

The following chapter expands the idea of return. The Ethiopian abroad can also hold a ladder, even without moving permanently home.

REMEMBER *Climb, build, then leave the next step intact.*

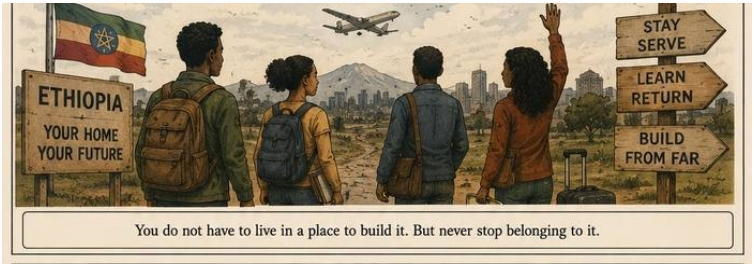
LETTER PAUSE

The final responsibility of success is to make the next person’s climb more lawful, not more humiliating.

CHAPTER 52

Come Home in More Than One Way

Return can be physical, intellectual, economic, moral, and generational



The word home becomes complicated after migration. A person leaves Ethiopia at twenty and returns at sixty. The street has changed. The family has changed. The person has changed. Everybody expects familiarity, but familiarity has been living in memory while the country continued without permission. Some migrants will return permanently.

Some will not.

This should not become a moral ranking.

A person can remain in Ethiopia while stealing from it. Another can live ten thousand miles away while supporting parents, educating relatives, mentoring students, funding a clinic, collaborating on research, building a business, or defending the dignity of Ethiopian workers.

Geography alone does not measure loyalty.

At the same time, diaspora pride can become too comfortable. It is easy to love Ethiopia as an idea while criticizing the people doing daily work inside it. It is easy to recommend policies whose consequences will be carried by others. It is easy to arrive for two weeks, explain the nation,

and leave before the electricity returns. Contribution requires humility.

Young Ethiopian abroad, ask what people on the ground need, not only what you are excited to give. A donated machine without maintenance may become furniture. A training program without local ownership may become a photograph. An investment that depends on political connections may reproduce the problem it claims to solve.

Build relationships, not rescue performances.

Return can take many forms.

A scientist can co-supervise a student.

A physician can create a referral partnership.

An engineer can review designs.

A teacher can build open lessons.

A businessperson can invest patiently and ethically. A writer can translate knowledge.

A parent can teach children an Ethiopian language without teaching them inherited hatred.

A citizen can vote, organize, or advocate according to the laws available.

A successful professional can open a door for somebody without demanding permanent gratitude.

The Ethiopian state should make these forms of return easier. Clear investment rules, professional credential pathways, research agreements, diaspora bonds with accountability, transparent land systems, efficient customs, and reliable consular services matter. Appeals to patriotism cannot substitute for predictable institutions.

“Come home” is not a policy.

It is an invitation requiring an address, a process, and evidence that the front door opens.

The country must also respect those who never left. Diaspora experience should not automatically outrank local experience. The person who worked through shortages, political changes, low pay, and institutional frustration possesses knowledge the visitor does not.

Partnership requires equal dignity.

There is a generational form of return too. Children born abroad may never live permanently in Ethiopia, yet they can remain connected through language, history, family, art, faith, scholarship, travel, business, and service. Do not burden them with a test of authenticity they cannot pass. Give them a relationship they can deepen.

Identity is not protected by humiliation.

Professor Alula once treated the passport as a line he would not cross. Later history pushed him abroad. His story reminds us that belonging and location can separate.

The goal is not to force every Ethiopian body back onto Ethiopian soil.

The goal is to build a country to which knowledge, trust, investment, families, and hope can move in both directions. Come home if you can.

Contribute if you cannot.

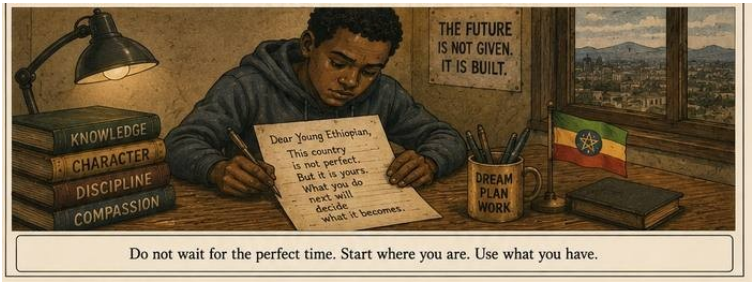
And wherever you live, do not make Ethiopia smaller in the name of loving it.

REMEMBER *Return is not one journey. It is every honest way a person reconnects knowledge, work, resources, and responsibility to the country.*

CHAPTER 53

A Letter to You

You were born into a great nation — now decide what it will become


THE FUTURE IS NOT GIVEN. IT IS BUILT.
KNOWLEDGE
CHARACTER
DISCIPLINE
COMPASSION
Dear Young Ethiopian, This country is not perfect. But it is yours. What you do next will decide what it becomes.
DREAM
PLAN
WORK
Do not wait for the perfect time. Start where you are. Use what you have.

Young Ethiopian, You will inherit more than land and history.

You will inherit unfinished arguments, damaged institutions, beautiful traditions, deep faith, extraordinary talent, old fears, new technologies, and a political culture that has often mistaken the leader for the country.

You are not responsible for everything that happened before you were born.

You are responsible for what you repeat after understanding it. Do not inherit hatred simply because it arrived with a family story. Listen to the story. Respect the pain. Then refuse to turn another child into the enemy required by your memory. Do not worship power. A leader is a citizen temporarily carrying a public responsibility. He is not the father of adults, the owner of history, or the final interpreter of Ethiopia.

Do not despise work. Learn something difficult. Become useful. Finish what you begin. Teach somebody behind you. Do not use patriotism as a substitute for performance. Love Ethiopia in the quality of what you build.

Do not use foreign success as evidence of Ethiopian inferiority. Study it. Adapt it. Improve it.

Do not support war casually. Remember the mother at the door. Do not remain silent simply because the hyena has not reached your leg.

Do not demand a perfect leader. Demand institutions strong enough to correct an imperfect one.

And when your own generation enters office, remember how easy it is to become the joke you once told about somebody else. One day, you may receive a title. The chair may become larger. People may laugh at jokes you did not know were jokes. Advisers may describe your smallest thought as historic.

At that moment, look for the ladder.

Make sure it is still there.

Ethiopia does not need another generation that begins from zero. It needs a generation that remembers, learns, laughs, works, builds, and leaves the next step intact.

You were born into a great nation.

Now decide what it will become.

REMEMBER *This letter is not an instruction. It is an argument worth having.*

CHAPTER 54

The Peace Treaty Cannot Grow Back Your Leg

There is no permanent enemy, but there are permanent wounds

NO PEACE AGREEMENT CAN RESTORE WHAT WAR DESTROYS.
SCHOOLS
HOSPITALS
ROADS
JOBS
FUTURE
The cost of war is paid in blood. The price of peace is paid in work.

Young Ethiopian, imagine two leaders who have spent three years explaining that the man across the border is a permanent enemy.

On Monday, the enemy is described as a snake. On Tuesday, he becomes a hyena. By Wednesday, the national television station has found an animal documentary and is using it as political analysis.

The Minister of Urgent Anger appears on television wearing a serious face and a tie so tight that peace has no room to enter. He tells young people that history is calling them. History, in these moments, has a remarkable habit of calling the children of poor families first.

Young men and women leave school, farms, workshops, universities, and homes. Mothers begin listening for footsteps. Fathers begin pretending not to be afraid. The powerful give speeches about sacrifice from rooms with excellent security. Then, one year or five years later, something astonishing happens.

The permanent enemy becomes a distinguished brother.

The two leaders meet at a summit. They shake hands. They smile. They sign an agreement under a banner saying PEACE, PARTNERSHIP, AND A SHARED FUTURE. Yesterday one president said the other was a danger to civilization. Today he calls him a visionary statesman before the soup arrives. The television station changes the music. The war drums are replaced by a flute. The same commentator who explained why negotiation was betrayal now explains why negotiation is historic wisdom. He does not become embarrassed. Political memory is apparently not included in his employment contract. Peace is good. The handshake should be welcomed. Borders should reopen. Trade should return. Prisoners should come home. Diplomats should rediscover one another. The tragedy is not that enemies make peace.

The tragedy is that the young person who paid for yesterday's hatred cannot reverse the payment when today's friendship begins.

The Body Is Not a Temporary Policy

A government can change a policy in one afternoon. A party can replace a slogan before dinner.

A leader can delete an old speech, appoint a new ambassador, reopen a road, and declare a new era.

The body cannot do this.

A lost hand does not grow back because two presidents have discovered regional cooperation. A lost leg does not return when a border checkpoint reopens. An eye does not reappear because yesterday's traitor has become today's strategic partner. A grave does not release a child when politicians decide that the conflict was based on a misunderstanding.

This does not mean that a person who loses a limb becomes less complete as a human being. He or she remains fully equal in dignity, intelligence, love, citizenship, and

possibility. Many wounded people rebuild powerful, creative, and meaningful lives. Rehabilitation, medicine, prosthetic technology, family, and personal courage can restore movement and independence.

But rebuilding a life is not the same as undoing the wound. The person carries the cost into every staircase, every job search, every night of pain, every journey, and every future plan. The politician may carry only a new talking point. So when a leader tells you that the political moment requires your body, ask whether the leader understands that your body is not a temporary government program.

Who Sends Whose Child?

Before accepting a speech about glorious sacrifice, ask a simple question: Whose child is being asked to go?

The leader may genuinely believe the country is in danger. Sometimes nations must defend people against attack. This chapter is not saying that self-defense is never necessary. It is saying that war must be the last serious option, not the first theatrical proof of patriotism.

If the children of the powerful are studying safely abroad while the children of ordinary families are told that death is honorable, the arithmetic deserves inspection.

Patriotism should not mean that the poor provide the blood while the powerful provide the adjectives. Ask whether the people demanding sacrifice share the risk. Ask whether their families use the same hospital, road, school, and security system. Ask whether they have explored negotiation with the same energy they used to print recruitment banners.

A leader who refuses every peaceful option should not be praised for bravery when other people will carry the wounds.

There Is No Permanent Enemy

Countries fight and later trade. Governments insult one another and later exchange ambassadors. Parties divide and later form coalitions. Armed opponents sometimes sit at the same table because reality eventually becomes more persuasive than pride.

This is not weakness. It is one of the oldest facts of politics: interests change, leaders change, generations change, and yesterday's enemy may become tomorrow's partner. The Ministry of Permanent Enemies may even be renamed the Office of Regional Cooperation before the sign painter has finished the first sign.

That is why you should be very careful before surrendering something permanent to an anger that may be temporary. A relationship can be rebuilt. A bridge can be repaired. A border can reopen. Trade can restart. A political agreement can be rewritten. Your hand or leg cannot be grown again by a press release.

A wise citizen therefore loves the country with judgment. He does not confuse caution with cowardice or negotiation with surrender. She asks whether the goal can be reached through law, elections, diplomacy, organization, economic pressure, public evidence, patient institution-building, or compromise before violence is accepted.

Do Not Let Tribe Borrow Your Body

Love your language. Love your community. Learn its songs, stories, jokes, food, faith, memories, and wounds. Identity can give a person belonging and responsibility.

But do not allow a politician to rent your identity and return it covered in somebody else's blood.

Tribal thinking begins when the first political question is not, "Is this true, lawful, useful, and humane?" but, "Which group said it?"

Then the same action becomes heroic when our side does it and criminal when another side does it. Our prisoner is a martyr. Their prisoner is a threat. Our rumor is testimony. Their evidence is propaganda.

A modern mind refuses this arithmetic.

Modern does not mean wearing foreign clothes, using foreign words, or taking photographs beside foreign buildings. Modern means evidence before rumor, equal law before group loyalty, institutions before personalities, education before slogans, and citizenship before inherited suspicion. You can honor your community without reducing the nation to competing bloodlines. You can remember injustice without assigning guilt to a child who did not commit it. You can defend rights without requiring a permanent enemy.

Do Not Be Carried by the Flood

Political anger often arrives like a flood.

A video appears. A rumor follows. A speech becomes a chant. A chant becomes a duty. Everyone seems to be moving in one direction, and movement is mistaken for thought.

But a log in a flood also moves quickly. It is not leading.

Do not confuse being carried with moving forward. The flood tells you there is no time to verify. No time to ask who benefits. No time to hear another community. No time to consider tomorrow. The flood says hesitation is betrayal. Pause anyway.

Check the source. Read beyond the headline. Ask what is missing from the video. Ask whether an old photograph has been given a new date. Ask whether the loudest account is also the most reliable. Ask whether the person urging confrontation will remain near the consequences.

A citizen who pauses is not weak. He is protecting his mind from becoming public transportation.

Education Is a Life Jacket

Educate yourself beyond the diploma.

Learn history from more than one side. Learn enough law to recognize when emergency language is swallowing rights. Learn enough economics to understand what war does to prices, jobs, debt, investment, and the future of children. Learn enough science to respect evidence. Learn enough media literacy to recognize manipulation. Learn enough humanity to imagine the person standing on the other side of the slogan.

Education should give you the ability to stand inside a crowd without lending the crowd your brain.

The educated person is not the one who can repeat the most complicated political vocabulary. It is the one who can ask a simple question while everyone else is shouting: What exactly are we trying to achieve, and is there a less destructive way to achieve it?

Before supporting war, ask seven questions. What is the exact objective? What peaceful options were tried? Who will carry the risk? Who will benefit? What is the exit plan? How will civilians be protected? What happens if today's enemy becomes tomorrow's negotiating partner?

If nobody can answer, do not donate your body to the confusion.

The Last Arithmetic

The political arithmetic is simple. A broken relationship may be repaired. A closed border may reopen. An enemy may become a friend. A country may rebuild. But the dead do not return, and the body does not reset when the policy changes.

So think before the flood carries you. Be modern enough to question your own side. Be educated enough to recognize temporary hatred. Be brave enough to prefer negotiation

before funerals. Be patriotic enough to protect the lives with which the nation must build its future.

One day the leaders may shake hands.

Make sure they have not used your hand to reach the table.

REMEMBER *Today's enemy may become tomorrow's partner. Your body is not a temporary political policy.*

LETTER PAUSE

Relationships can be rebuilt. A lost hand, leg, eye, or life cannot be restored by a later handshake.

Think modern. Educate yourself. Love your community without surrendering your judgment. Do not be carried by the flood.

EPILOGUE

When the Chairman Asks for a Bigger Chair

A final test for the young citizen

Young Ethiopian, imagine that the book has ended and the chairman has learned nothing.

He calls the carpenter.

“The chair is too small,” he says.

The carpenter measures it and discovers that the chair is already larger than the office. “Perhaps the office is the problem,” he suggests.

The chairman looks offended. “The office is the nation.”

A committee is formed to investigate the carpenter. This is the comic danger with which we began. Power converts personal insecurity into public architecture. The chair grows. The desk rises. The convoy lengthens. The microphone enlarges. The citizen shrinks.

But another ending is possible.

The young official enters the same office and notices that the waiting citizens have no seats. She removes part of the platform, places the chair on the floor, publishes the requirements for every service, and tells the assistant to answer the telephone as though the caller owns the building — because, collectively, the public does. Nothing dramatic happens. No song is written. The citizens leave with completed work.

That is the political culture this letter asks you to build: less theatrical greatness, more ordinary dignity.

The ladder remains. The chair becomes furniture. The bed receives a checkout date. The microphone returns to its proper size. The passport becomes protection. The boat

becomes a choice rather than an escape. The mother hears footsteps that truly belong to her child. These images are simple because political wisdom is often simple and difficult at the same time. Share power. Preserve knowledge. Protect opponents. Tell the truth. Finish the work. Leave safely. The chairman may still ask for a bigger chair.

You do not have to build it.

REMEMBER *The purpose of public office is not to make the officeholder feel larger. It is to make the citizen's life more workable.*

I have written many pages, but the letter can be reduced to several responsibilities.

Know your history without becoming imprisoned by it. Honor suffering without manufacturing a new enemy. Study deeply and remain teachable.

Build systems that do not depend on your personality. Practice losing before asking to lead.

Treat ordinary work as national work.

Protect the ladder.

Young Ethiopian, you may disagree with much of this book. Good. A letter to a generation should not demand applause. It should begin an argument worth having.

Test the claims. Ask elders for their memories. Read historians who disagree. Examine documents. Visit monuments. Listen to people from communities other than your own. Learn enough economics to recognize fantasy, enough law to recognize arbitrary power, enough science to respect evidence, and enough literature to recognize another human life.

Do not let social media become your only parliament, university, court, and battlefield. Its speed rewards anger before understanding. An algorithm has no duty to preserve Ethiopia.

Build friendships across political and identity lines before crisis. Trust created during conflict is fragile. Trust created during ordinary life can resist propaganda.

You will be told that the moment is exceptional and therefore principles must wait. Every generation hears this. Security matters, but temporary exceptions have excellent survival skills. Ask who decides when the exception ends.

You will be told that unity requires silence. Real unity can hear disagreement. Forced silence produces a quiet surface and deep fracture.

You will be told that your group must control power because others cannot be trusted. If every group follows this logic, nobody can ever feel safe. Equal rules are the only durable protection. You will be tempted to leave. Perhaps you should. Travel can educate, protect, and enlarge life. Leaving is not betrayal. But do not let distance make you reckless with people who remain, and do not let success teach contempt for the country that formed you. You may stay. Staying is not automatically patriotism. Serve honestly. Refuse to steal time, money, or opportunity from the public.

You may enter politics. Remember that citizens are adults. They do not need a permanent father. They need rights, services, truth, and a safe method for replacing you.

You may never hold office. Most nation building happens outside it.

Teach one student well. Treat one worker fairly. Preserve one record. Repair one machine. Tell one historical truth without hatred. Refuse one bribe. Protect one opponent’s right. Finish one useful thing.

These acts sound small because speeches have trained us to expect national salvation in large packages.

Countries are built from accumulated small competence. Ethiopia’s past is great enough to give you confidence and

painful enough to give you caution. The future remains undecided. I cannot build it for you.

My generation cannot complete it for you.

But we can leave a warning, a memory, a tool, and a ladder. Take them.

Climb higher than we did.

Then leave the ladder standing.

REMEMBER *You are not responsible for everything you inherit. You are responsible for what you repeat after understanding it.*

LETTER PAUSE

Keep the ladder. Leave the next step intact.

The Chairman’s Pocket Dictionary

Useful translations for young citizens

Historic decision. A decision announced before the details have arrived.

Temporary measure. A measure that has already selected permanent furniture.

National consultation. A meeting at which the nation is informed what it has concluded.

Stakeholder. A person invited after the stake has been placed.

Implementation challenge. The moment the speech meets geography.

Technical difficulty. A political decision wearing safety glasses.

Security concern. Sometimes a real danger; sometimes a question the official dislikes.

Public participation. Citizens provide applause, chairs, and weather.

Independent institution. An institution independent enough to agree quickly.

Capacity building. A workshop where the same people receive a new folder.

Strategic plan. A document with excellent verbs and no mechanic.

Pilot project. A small success waiting to become a large procurement problem.

Accountability. A principle strongly supported for the previous government.

Rule of law. The idea that the rule should also recognize the ruler.

Decentralization. Sending responsibility downward and keeping the money upstairs.

National unity. A beautiful goal that becomes suspicious when it requires everybody to sound identical.

Development corridor. A road along which land values are moving faster than residents.

Transformation. Change large enough to require a banner.

Reform committee. A group formed to protect the institution from sudden improvement.

Dialogue. Talking until the most powerful person becomes comfortable.

Consensus. The silence after everyone notices who controls appointments.

Merit. A qualification discovered most often among relatives and supporters.

Diaspora engagement. An invitation to send money, expertise, and preferably no criticism.

Youth leadership. A young person reading a speech approved by an older person.

Women's empowerment. A panel containing one woman and six men explaining her future.

Transparency. Publishing information after it has lost the ability to change anything.

Emergency meeting. The natural habitat of an avoidable problem.

National interest. A serious concept requiring evidence, especially when used to end a conversation.

Exit strategy. The ladder the leader should protect before reaching the roof.

Public servant. The correct name for the person who temporarily sits in the public chair.

The Chairman’s Final Examination

No convoys, advisers, or emergency powers permitted. A seven-question test for anyone who believes a large chair has made him a large person.

1. Can you hear criticism without calling security?

2. Can you appoint someone who is smarter than you and allow that person to remain smart?

3. Can your child use the same school, hospital, road, and electricity system as an ordinary citizen?

4. Can a journalist embarrass you and still sleep at home?

5. Can an opponent win an election without becoming a national emergency?

6. Can you leave the chair before the chair becomes your skeleton?

7. Can the country function the morning after you retire?

Scoring. Seven yes answers: You may be ready to serve. Five or six: Keep practicing humility. Three or four: Return the convoy keys. Zero to two: Please step away from the constitution and put down the microphone.

REMEMBER *Leadership is not proved by reaching the top. It is proved by leaving the ladder intact for the next person.*

Notes on Sources, Memory, and Satire

This edition is political satire and civic reflection, not a chronological history of Ethiopia or Africa. Its leaders are fictional composites built from recurring institutional habits rather than portraits of named living individuals. The Professor Alula passport episode is presented as the author recalls Professor Alula telling it. Readers should treat it as attributed personal recollection unless archival correspondence is located. The chapters discussing current economic performance should be updated against authoritative public data before each new edition; specific numbers age faster than political slogans. The Michael Jackson analogy is used as a lesson about excellence forcing cultural gatekeepers to respond; it is not a claim that one individual ended discrimination. The book's central civic claims concern institutions: lawful entry and exit from power, independent courts, open information, professional administration, peaceful political competition, and the dignity of ordinary citizens. Chapter 61 is a civic argument about the permanence of human loss and the temporary nature of many political alignments. It does not deny a country's right to defend people against attack; it argues that force should follow serious examination of lawful and peaceful alternatives. Dr. Mugeta's prison account and the salary figures in "The Missing Generation" are likewise presented as the author's recollection, not as archival record.

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All chapter illustrations and the frontispiece in this edition are original AI-assisted editorial illustrations prepared under the author’s direction for this book. They depict fictional composite characters and symbolic situations; no living individual is portrayed. The captions printed within the plates are part of the artwork.

The five interludes (a memorandum, a job advertisement, an examination, a citizen’s letter, and a scientific paper), the discussion questions, and the chapters “The Hyena in the Palace” and “The Missing Generation” were added in this revised, illustrated edition.

No third-party photographs are reproduced in this edition.

About the Author

Dr. Mesfin Taye is a physics professor and author with a background in theoretical condensed-matter physics, statistical mechanics, stochastic processes, and interdisciplinary science. He was trained in Ethiopia and later worked internationally, including at the Max Planck Institute in Germany and in Taiwan, Korea, Japan, and the United States.

His writing aims to make difficult scientific and social questions accessible through clear language, stories, sharp jokes, and moral reflection. In this book he writes as an Ethiopian teacher and satirist addressing the generation that will inherit both the country and the unfinished paperwork.

KEEP THE LADDER.

LEAVE THE NEXT STEP INTACT.

Dr. Mesfin Taye

Questions for Your Generation

Three questions to argue about before the epilogue.

1. Which single institution, if it survived every leader, would improve life most in your country?

2. What is one step of the ladder you personally can help build or protect?

3. The book's rule: laugh at the chair, question the microphone, inspect the budget, keep the ladder standing. Which is hardest? Why?